



INTERSCOPE
COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

DEAD AT 21

Based on the MTV series

Screenplay

by

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"DEAD AT 21"

FADE IN:

An amorphous, surreal GRID PATTERN swimming with chromatic COLOR; its plasmic, virtual-plastic SQUARES RESOLVING INTO:

CLOSE-UP - A COMPUTERIZED TEST PAGE

The kind with the numbered squares you black in. CLASSROOM SHUFFLING NOISES OS as we come into FOCUS inside:

INT. CLASSROOM (BOSTON COLLEGE) - DAY

Where MATT - (20, rumped, likable, slightly bookish, not nerdy, self-conscious, sharp, earnest. Our main man.) - sweats a mid-term in ABSTRACT NUMBER THEORY. The test should be as incomprehensible as possible, and he's far from done. The superamplified click-CHUNK of the room clock's SECOND HAND mocks his distress. He scribbles another fill-in. Probably wrong. Hesitates. Click-CHUNK.

MATT

No, wait ...

A bearded, hefty CAREER T.A. overrides everybody.

T.A.

Time. All pencils down, please.

MATT

Shit.

Fifteen spaces incomplete out of a hundred, Matt's test is WHISKED AWAY. He rolls his eyes and MIMES shooting himself in the head, which gets a few laughs as his noggin THONKS on the desktop and we CUT SHARP TO:

NIGHTMARE IMAGES

Hideous, lurid FLASH VIEWS of electronics, moist surgery, chemicals -- like the GRID PATTERN, but HOSTILE, favoring BRAIN IMAGERY and a high-tech horrorshow SPIDERWEB. MUSIC OVER the CUT TO:

INT. MATT'S DORM ROOM - DAY

BACKING OUT of a clipping tacked to a shelf, with the following expressed as a mathematical formula:

1 Information is not knowledge
+2 Knowledge is not Wisdom
+3 Wisdom is not the Truth
< Power

ANGLE - MATT, SEATED BEFORE A COMPUTER

His face astonishingly BLANK, eyes OPEN, jaw AJAR.

LUTHER (OS)

Hel-LO, Earth to Matthew, come on.

WITH LUTHER AS HE GETS UP

Turning the OS MUSIC DOWN to SNAP his fingers at Matt's apparent trance. LUTHER is hawklike: wide grin, pointed nose, intense. He has been in college for 10 years. So far.

WIDEN on the ROOM, BISECTED between two personalities. Luther's HALF is a chaotic collage of clothing, cutouts, and career student detritus. Empty storage boxes await.

Matt's HALF, by contrast, is almost spartan. The bed is made. Matt's stuff is boxed up for storage, but NEATLY, filed on SHELVES, one of the boxes TILTED for access, to reveal the BOOKS of an eclectic Lit minor: Gide, Bulgakov, some Nabokov, the usual Joyce and James.

On the screen before Matt is a CHESS GAME, insistently BLINKING "IT'S YOUR MOVE" next to a supered chess clock.

MATT

Sorry. Zoned out there.

LUTHER

I said, you still haven't learned the fundamental rule of a university education.

A POSTER of Einstein glares at them with the legend:
IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE.

LUTHER (CON'T)

The only skill you need to develop in college is the ability to pass tests.

Matt loves Luther but does not wish to become Luther.

MATT

Yeah. Then I could go to school for, god, 20 or 30 more years ...

LUTHER

Hey, you can change majors every year and a half. No strain.

MATT

What does this have to do with me?

LUTHER

What does everybody in America want?

MATT

To make a modest profit?

LUTHER

They want to watch TV, eat junk food, call phone psychics, reproduce, but most of all, they want that one big score, they wanna inherit a fortune, they wanna win the lottery. Why? So they can kick back and consume.

MATT

I just know you're gonna get to the point before the end of the week.

LUTHER

This is me, winning the lottery.

He gives Matt a DISK featuring the "NO" symbol (red circle bisected by diagonal slash).

MATT

New virus?

LUTHER

My boy, calling that a "virus" is like calling the Nazis "cranky."

MATT

What'll it take out?

LUTHER

Every unit in the building; every database, anything connected by phone.

Luther makes EXPLODING noises. Bombs. Fallout.

MATT

Who do you want to crash?

LUTHER

Nobody.

MATT

Oh. Calling card?

LUTHER

Resume. Also --

Luther SLIPS the disk into Matt's pocket. PATS it. Safe.

LUTHER (CON'T)

Birthday present. Since I didn't get you anything. If you weren't here I'd call you long distance.

Matt clutches at his heart.

MATT

Yeah, and call me a penis ...

LUTHER

I'll autograph it if you want, when I get back.

Luther is ON HIS WAY OUT.

MATT (CON'T)

You going to the storage locker place?

LUTHER

Yeah, unless you want all this crap to live in the street.

(indicates ROOM)

Unless you wanna take it with you.

MATT

Go nuts.

Luther has DISCOVERED an envelope that has been slipped beneath the door. Matt's NAME on it. He hands it over.

LUTHER

Special delivery.

Luther EXITS. Matt REGARDS the plain white envelope. OPENS it and is confronted by:

A 4x5 X-RAY FICHE OF A HUMAN SKULL

Emphasizing the BRAIN, an opaque BEAD SHAPE nestled into the hippocampus region. No relevant ID or labeling.

Matt's EXPRESSION says he's being messed with. Decisively he keys a COUNTERMOVE onto the video chessboard, then snatches up a CELLULAR PHONE and punches an autodial number. Smug.

INT. DR. GREGG'S OFFICE - DAY

DR. GREGG (25) is an internist; dour, blond, Matt's pal; his office in the college's Medical Center. Seated at a desk, Gregg is hurrying through a snack and puzzling Matt's CHESSE GAME from the enemy side of the board as his PHONE RINGS. He ANSWERS, crooking the receiver beneath his ear.

MATT (PHONE VO)

Suck on that.

DR. GREGG

Took you long enough.

INTERCUT between the MATT and GREGG SETUPS as needed.

MATT

Watch the board; don't watch the clock.

DR. GREGG

You outta here tomorrow?

MATT

That's right. This X-ray your idea of a bye-bye card?

SIMULTANEOUSLY they both say:

MATT/DR. GREGG

"What X-ray?" --

MATT (CON'T)

-- right, never mind, forget it.

Matt clearly thinks Gregg is screwing around with him.

DR. GREGG

I don't know what you're talking about,
but that's nothing new. I do know,
Matthew, m'boy, that in your haste to
box me in you have fallen into a trap
of near-classic proportions. Keep
your eye on the dancing horseman.

Gregg makes a devastating KNIGHT MOVE that forks Matt's king
and queen, jeopardizing both.

DR. GREGG (CON'T)

Check.

Matt's expression quickly CURDLES. Ruefully:

MATT

You're a doctor. You're supposed to
help people.

DR. GREGG

My tears would fill buckets. Stop by
here tomorrow before you blow town.

Matt is REALLY FRUSTRATED by this move.

MATT

I'll get back to you.

He HANGS UP, pronto. His finger tentatively MOVES to touch a
key and BANG CUT TO:

NIGHTMARE IMAGES

Anatomical, moist, frightening, FAST CUTS, a rollercoaster
TUNNEL whose terminus is again the gooey, cargo-net-sized WEB
-- except now a WOMAN can be seen TRAPPED in it.

INT. MATT'S DORM ROOM - NIGHT - (EXACT TIME CUT)

As Matt touches the KEY and it seems to magically CHANGE from
DAY to NIGHT. His expression has gone SLACK again. The
supered CHESS CLOCK has counted off TWO HOURS. In the
screen, his EYES seem to REFLECT as RED POINTS, like LEDs.

He rubs his neck. This has happened to him before, and some
minor RECOVERY is involved.

CELLULAR PHONE TRILLS OS.

Matt ANSWERS. Still stiff, semi-drained.

MATT

Yeah, I'm here.

REBECCA'S VOICE (VO)

Are you cramming?

Matt's attitude MELLOWS; he and Rebecca are an item. He SQUINTS at the skull fiche against the light of his computer.

MATT

Nope.

REBECCA'S VOICE (VO)

Would you like to be?

INT. REBECCA'S ROOM - NIGHT

A collegiate-chic chaos of pastels, haphazardly-packed BOXES and matched designer luggage. A TV plays a monster movie, SOUND DOWN. Mummified in floral sheets, Matt and REBECCA (20ish and eminently SUITABLE as mating material goes) are vigorously COPULATING on top of two boxes labeled **THIS END UP**. Matt's on top UNTIL --

Rebecca ROLLS. The box COLLAPSES and they wind up on the floor, Rebecca on top, chugging like a racehorse to CLIMAX.

MATT

Wait ... no, wait, Beckah ...
waitaminute ... wait-wait-wait -- !

Matt COMES a little quicker than he'd intended ... just as somebody in the MONSTER MOVIE, BG, SCREAMS. TIME CUT TO:

MATT AND REBECCA ON FRONT OF TV (LATER)

Campout style, sheet-robed, clinking shots of Jagermeister.

MATT

You still have to leave at six o'clock
in the morning?

REBECCA

"Going home" for you is an hour drive.

MATT

An hour and change.

REBECCA

You don't have to pack. And fly.

Matt SWIGS overpriced bubble water. Uncomfortable BEAT.

REBECCA (CON'T)

One math test is not the end of the world.

MATT

I'm doomed to spend the rest of my life living in my Mom's basement, designing web pages for geeks.

REBECCA

So don't plan your future so fast.

MATT

Why not? Sometimes I think my life is all a demented fantasy, anyway. Like we'll ever make it to thirty without getting blown up or run over or irradiated by cancer or invaded by aliens or made obsolete. Shit, pick one. I don't know.

REBECCA

(snickers)

God, no wonder you can't study; you're acting too much like a grownup. Relax. You're in the prime of life. I think you're pretty swell. Relax. Relax.

She tries to get him to lie BACK, to UNCOIL, as though she's mesmerizing him or proving a point. Matt's brow WRINKLES.

MATT

"Swell?" Did you say I was "swell?"

Matt RECLINES, breathes deep. He's going to prove her wrong. The PHONE RINGS and Rebecca snatches it up.

REBECCA

Yesssss?

(hands off to Matt)

My phone. For you.

Matt puts the receiver to his ear and RECOILS from:

LUTHER'S VOICE (PHONE)
Happy Birthday, PENIS!

MATT
(to Rebecca)
What time is it? Midnight?

Rebecca checks a clock and NODS.

MATT
I love you too, Luther.

LUTHER'S VOICE (PHONE)
Matt, are you fucking? You guys are
fucking over there, aren't you -- ?

Matt HANGS UP on Luther's salacious tirade.

MATT
I can't believe he called me here.

Rebecca produces a Milky Way Dark with a LIT candle stuck in
it.

REBECCA
Happy birthday.

Rebecca looks pretty damned good by that candlelight. Matt
BLOWS OUT the candle. LIGHTS OUT. BLACK FRAME.

EXT. MATT'S DORM - DAY

Matt PARKS a weathered Mustang convertible and DEBARKS.

REVERSE ANGLE - ON MATT

In the FAR BG we can JUST SEE A FIGURE BACK OUT OF SIGHT.
Matt seems to suffer a sunlight SQUINT; by the time he LOOKS
toward BG, the FIGURE is GONE. Matt rubs his temple.

INT. MATT'S DORM ROOM - DAY

Luther's half is VACANT, his chaos magically GONE ... except
for a small TAPE RECORDER very obvious on the naked BED.
Matt hits PLAYBACK. Luther's voice, utterly MONOTONE:

LUTHER (TAPE VO)

Happy birthday to you. You have no friends and everyone is out to get you. Therefore, you cannot leave town without first reporting to the Slaughterhouse. I'm buying. Be there at eight. Aloha!

During PLAYBACK, Matt relocates both Luther's DISC and the skull FICHE, and POCKETS them. He makes one final move on the computer chess game, typing I CONCEDE, then unplugs the monitor and begins BOXING the components.

INT. / EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

TRANSITIONAL FLASH CUTS that at first look like more NIGHTMARE IMAGERY, but depict this CLUB's user-friendly fake gore ambience. Mirrors, smoke, flash, hustle, substance abuse and truly abrasive, HAMMERING MUSIC.

LUTHER (VO)

So, what -- you get a degree, you move to Seattle, get some nerd-collar gig at MicroSoft or DataMax or Apple --

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

Matt and Luther at one of several BARS, in birthday mode.

MATT

BO-ring.

LUTHER

Then you mate with Rebecca and have 2.5 fetuses.

MATT

Luther, I'm 21 years old and I'm not ready to "mate" with anybody.

Luther has just caught the eye of a biker-style BARKEEP. You have to SHOUT to be heard in here.

LUTHER

That reminds me. Bartender, give my accomplice here his first real, legal drink!

Barkeep MOTIONS to Matt.

BARKEEP

Let's see the ID.

MATT

I was made the year Nixon resigned.
(no reaction from Barkeep)
Nixon? He was a President?

Barkeep stays blasé. Ponies up a schooner of brew. SMILES.

BARKEEP

On the house. Cheers.

MATT

Thanks!

LUTHER

Get him shit-faced, 'cos I'm driving.

BARKEEP

What a relief.

Matt GRINS; Luther TOASTS him.

LUTHER

So where is she? Rebecca?

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

ARRIFLEX POV MOVES UP on the ENTRANCE - a fake GUILLOTINE that SLICES DOWN as each of the queued-up TRENDIDS and POSEURS passes the scrutiny of a pair of steroidal BOUNCERS clad in skintight, "bloodstained" logo Tees.

MATT (VO)

Had to go home this morning, to
Kansas or Nebraska or Wyoming.
One of those places ...

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT - (RESUMING)

Matt is sort of looking PAST Luther, for a restroom.

LUTHER

All of those places. It's back there.

Matt follows Luther's thumb, TWEEZING through the THRONG. CAMERA TRACKS WITH HIM, then HOLDS to REVEAL STEF - 20s, sallow, dark, furtive, street-smart, a duster-clad fugitive, (GLIMPSED EARLIER IN THE EXT. DORM SHOT).

REVERSE ANGLE MOVING POV

Of Stef DOGGING Matt from gaps in the crowd. Ultraviolent VIDEO on the club monitors. Splatter clips.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE MENS ROOM - NIGHT

TIGHT on a coke-snorting YUPSTER at the sink mirror. Matt ENTERS, has to use a STALL.

INSIDE THE STALL

As Matt pushes the door shut and UNZIPS, Stef PUSHES inside BEHIND HIM and LATCHES the stall door.

MATT

What the fuck -- !

Stef holds a finger to his lips, desperate.

STEF

Shut up.

Matt hits HIGH BURN as he tries to escape.

MATT

You fucking asshole! Hey!

Stef BULLDOGS Matt deftly over the toilet. In an eyeblink an unlimbered BUTTERFLY KNIFE is kissing Matt's Adam's apple.

STEF

Listen. I don't have time to make you get religion. I'm risking my ass just to come out in the open. Pay attention to everything I say or I'll open you up like a piñata full of lunchmeat.

A BEAT of utter, bugfuck, panicked SILENCE.

STEF (CON'T)

I sent you the X-ray.

MATT

(scared)

I don't even know who you are, man.

STEF

Have any cool nightmares lately?

MATT

Why do you think I have nightmares?

STEF

That's a good one.

FLASH CUT: More NIGHTMARE IMAGERY - MOVING UP on the Horror Web from behind - the VICTIM turns to SCREAM and it's MATT!

RESUME MATT AND STEF

Matt seems STUNNED from this shot in the brain, as if Stef has just INDUCED this vision in him. Nervously:

MATT

Think you could relax that thing?

STEF

Sure, if you'll calm down.

Stef eases the blade off like he's got nothing to lose.

STEF (CON'T)

Long story short: You and me are all part of a top-secret experiment, along with some other kids who're dead now.

MATT

Oh give me a break.

STEF

You think you're just some adopted kid hacking his way through school, bright future, all that. You've got a ticking clock in your brain that means you're dead and you don't know it. A timebomb. Up here.

Stef TAPS his temple while OUTSIDE a giant muscleboy, TURK, pounds on the stall door.

TURK

Hey, sweethearts. Anytime.

STEF

You know Somerset Memorial Park?

ALARM in Matt's eyes.

MATT

Why?

STEF

Go there tomorrow. Find the grave of Adam James Pike if you want to know more.

MATT

Grave?

TURK

I'm gonna piss over the door.

Stef produces a VIDEOCASSETTE in a black box and presses it into Matt's grasp.

STEF

Just watch the this. You'll know what to do next.

Stef EXITS in a flash, leaving Matt to grin sheepishly at the florid Turk, who is not amused.

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

A dark CAR (no chrome, chaser engine) glides up, parks.

INT. CHAMBERS' CAR - NIGHT

TIGHT SHOTS of the DRIVER

Holstering a big 9mm AUTO PISTOL with recoil compensator and SILENCER in a shoulder rig. Next to spare magazines is strapped a STUN GUN. HANDCUFFS are pocketed. Skintight black leather gloves CREAK as they are snugged.

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT - (CONTINUOUS)

Out steps CHAMBERS - mid-20s, a sleek operative, his 3/4 coat covering his hardware. CAMERA WITH him as he CUTS to the head of the queue ... where a BOUNCER GRABS him.

BOUNCER

Hey.

Chambers GRABS right back, fierce, lunatic.

CHAMBERS

HEY!

Bouncer is HURTING. He sees the GUN inside Chambers' coat. Chambers FLASHES official ID.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Lemme see your ID. Both of you. Now!

Sheepishly, both Bouncers comply. The crowd WILDLY APPROVES.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Nobody else in, nobody out. Tell 'em.

Chambers slides inside. Bouncer keys his headset:

BOUNCER

This is Kyle. Guess what.

INT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

RESUMING Luther at the bar as Matt returns, slightly derailed. Matt shows Luther the videocassette.

MATT

Luther, this isn't some sort of elaborate birthday joke ... is it?

Luther is genuinely -- honestly -- clueless.

LUTHER

Somebody in the can give you that?

As they speak, Chambers PASSES BG scoping the crowd, STOPS, and NOTICES MATT.

MATT (VO)

Not funny, Luther. Son of a bitch pulled a knife on me. A real knife.

ON CHAMBERS - REVERSE ANGLE AT MATT

Chambers is genuinely SURPRISED TO SEE MATT, but keeps his expression neutral as he changes course. Toward Matt.

LUTHER (VO)

Wait, wait --

AT THE BAR - AS CHAMBERS APPEARS NEXT TO MATT

LUTHER (CON'T)

Somebody pulled a knife on you, then they gave you a tape. Did they ask to see your weenie?

MATT

Never mind.

LUTHER

You're serious.

CHAMBERS

Are you the birthday boy?

Matt TURNS FROM LUTHER as Luther pesters the Barkeep; Matt offers an indulgent thank-you nod, slightly embarrassed.

MATT

I'm already tired of answering that question.

Chambers LEANS closer, friendly/deadly/superior.

CHAMBERS

Congratulations.

Matt NODS. This is a little un-comfy.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

I'd like you to come outside with me.

Matt thinks the wrong thing immediately and DRAWS BACK. Chambers CLAMPS Matt's wrist on the bar. Strong grip.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Now.

Too late -- Luther has already seen it. Jauntily:

LUTHER

This the guy you met in the bathroom?

Chambers SIGHS. Now it's complicated.

CHAMBERS

Ah, shit.

Chambers CHECKS HIS WATCH like a harried executive. To Matt:

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Watch this.

LUTHER

(still jokey)

Man, I wouldn't be holding hands like
that in a public pla --

In a single SMOOTH MOVE, like a striking cobra, Chambers
SLAPS his pistol down on the bar near Matt's hand ... GRABS
Matt's hand and SLAPS it onto the pistol ... then, HOLDING
Matt's hand with the pistol, LIFTS and SHOOTS LUTHER RIGHT IN
THE FOREHEAD.

Matt STARES, stunned, at the gun at the end of his own arm.

Luther's CORPSE FLOPS BACKWARD into some CLUBBERS, who
SCATTER and PANIC. Matt FREEZES IN SHOCK.

Chambers PUSHES Matt's "gun hand" skyward as though he has
just GRABBED it.

CHAMBERS

Stand back, everybody, please! I've
got him! I got him!

MATT

This guy's crazy! Look, he's got a
fuckin gun! Lemme go!

The BOUNCERS who already have the word are CLEARING a path
for Chambers toward the entrance. But a Biff-ly COLLEGIATE
TOUGH GUY GRABS Chambers' shoulder.

BIFF

Hey, buddy!

One-handed, Chambers IMPLODES BIFF'S NOSE with the gunbutt,
COLLAPSING him to his knees.

CHAMBERS

Mind your own beeswax, you Gen X
piece'a dogshit!

Chambers FLATTENS the Guy, STOMPS on his throat, keeping Matt
in check like a shoulder bag. Everybody GETS OUT OF THE WAY.

HERE COMES STEF - BURSTING FORTH FROM THE CROWD

VAULTING to TACKLE Chambers. The gun goes SPINNING across
the floor. FIGHT SPACE is instantly CLEARED. Chambers GRABS
for the gun with his left hand.

Stef SPEARS Chambers' left hand to the FLOOR with his butterfly knife and ROLLS OUT, GRABBING Chambers' GUN.

TIGHT SHOT - STEF AND MATT

Face-to-face, Matt can see that the PUPILS of Stef's EYES have gone a luminous RED. Stef SHOVES Matt away.

STEF

Leave!

Matt TURNS in flight as Stef LEAPS onto the bar surface.

STEF (CON'T)

Get the fuck outta here!

Chambers STANDS roughly BETWEEN them, pretending to play it sane and negotiative, flashing OFFICIAL-LOOKING ID.

CHAMBERS

Matt, don't listen -- this guy is a lunatic.

(to CLUBBERS)

Everybody please stay calm.

Stef YELLS to drown Chambers out, waving the gun at him:

STEF

Shut up! I got a good idea! Let's see what's inside your head!

BLOOD begins to trickle from Stef's nose. Chambers stays SOLID, facing down his own captured gun.

CHAMBERS

What you need to do ... is hand over that weapon ... and step down ...

STEF

I told you to shut up!

(to Matt)

Do me a favor, college boy. Stay as far away from this guy as you can.

Blood is now leaking from one of Stef's eyes.

CHAMBERS

Hey, Matt -- why don't you help me to help your friend up there?

STEF

How come he knows your name?!

Chambers, still boxed in, can't move on either of them. Matt ANGLES closer to Stef's position, confused, desperate.

MATT

Okay, I need your help. I don't know what to do. Come with me, what's your name, Stefan?

STEF

It's Stef. Thanks for the thought, amigo, but I'm already dead.

A tiny SMILE from Stef as he wipes BLOOD away with a sleeve. His eyes GLOWING weirdly.

STEF (CON'T)

See? I've gone red. Now get outta here.

Chambers counters like a stern authority figure.

CHAMBERS

Don't even think of doing it, Matt!

STEF

Go! Go! GO, goddammit!

This galvanizes Matt into retreat through the crowd, gathering speed, looking back a hundred times as Stef WAVERS, shutting down. Chambers wants to give chase, but Stef keeps the GUN steady.

STEF (CON'T)

Don't.

Now Chambers is merely pissed off.

CHAMBERS

Give it up, asshole.

STEF

Hey, Chambers. Here's one you didn't think of.

Stef plugs the muzzle against his temple and SHOOTs. The ensuing PANIC momentarily BURIES Chambers.

ZOOM IN ON MATT'S EXPRESSION as he SEES Stef go down. CROSSCUT WITH FLASHES OF THE NIGHTMARE IMAGES and SUPERMAGNIFIED VIEWS of the gun muzzle pressing into Stef's head and FIRING in SLO-MO.

Matt DUCKS LOW, seeming to VANISH.

ON CHAMBERS as he loses sight of Matt and begins to BULLY his way toward the front door.

EXT. SLAUGHTERHOUSE - NIGHT

As Chambers BARRELS out the door, shoving CLUBBERS aside, gun OUT. The BOUNCERS stay clear of him.

CHAMBER'S POV - OUTSIDE THE CLUB

Scanning, gun up, his WOUNDED left hand VISED into a bleeding FIST. No Matt.

ANGLE - PARKED CARS (OR PARKING LOT)

Matt PEEKS up. SEES Chambers head off. Matt EXITS.

EXT. DORMITORY - NIGHT

Matt approaches his dorm on foot and the first thing he sees are POLICE CARS. OFFICERS question kids at the entrance. When Matt COUNTS WINDOWS toward his own, he SEES a COP looking out from his room.

Matt hurriedly DIGS OUT the keys to his car, but --

ANGLE - DORMITORY PARKING

Cop flashlights FIND the license plate of Matt's Mustang.

RESUME MATT - IN CONCEALMENT

He calls Dr. Gregg on his cellular. MACHINE ANSWERS:

DR. GREGG (RECORDED VO)
This is Dr. Gregg's answering machine,
not a human being, so please talk when
you hear the beep, and talk nice.
(BEEP)

MATT
Gregg, this is Matt; if you're there,
pick up.

An excruciating WAIT, punctuated by a series of DIGITAL BEEPS that freak Matt out enough for him to HANG UP.

He attempts another number, but the phone FLASHES "CHARGE" at him and then WINKS DEAD. This is just what Matt needs.

MATT

Goddammit to hell ...

INT. MATT'S HOUSE - NIGHT - (EAST HARTFORD, CT)

BACKING OUT of a framed picture of Matt (age 10 - we'll see this shot later) past a PHONE, to FRAN, Matt's mom, 50, half-gray, bright and alive but CONCERNED.

FRAN

I was nearly a hundred percent certain
I wouldn't get news from you until
tomorrow.

EXT. PHONE CARRELL - NIGHT

Matt BLINKING against the exposed NEON above the phone.

MATT

Mom, has anything weird happened there,
I mean, any strangers calling the house,
anybody showing up unannounced?

FRAN (VO)

No, sweetie, the only time it gets weird
here is when you're home.

He relaxes a notch. Grabs the YELLOW PAGES.

MATT

Sorry if I woke you up; I know it's late.

Under CEMETERIES, Matt locates the address of SOMERSET
MEMORIAL PARK.

FRAN (VO)

That's okay, I wasn't asleep. I had a
date. Will I see you tomorrow?

BG, another POLICE CAR on the prowl SHINES a searchlight around. Matt involuntarily DUCKS.

MATT

Mom -- I gotta go. I'll see you
tomorrow. Love you.

He HANGS UP and EXITS as the light CROSSES the carrell.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

AS A CITY BUS PULLS AWAY, having deposited Matt.

UP ANGLE at an imposing, scrolled, LOCKED iron gate. Matt scopes around. Decides to jump the stone wall.

INSIDE THE CEMETERY

CLOSE on Matt as he unpockets a mini-flashlight, just bought.

Matt spot-checks headstones with his tiny light, moving BETWEEN trees and scrolled stone, startling at vague noises.

TIGHT ON A SMALL HEADSTONE

As the light FINDS and examines it:

ADAM JAMES PIKE

B: 21 June 1976 - D: 2 February 1987

Wearily, Matt SITS against a nearby tree. Swigs from bottled water he's brought with him. Speaks to the tiny grave:

MATT

So what now, Adam James? I'm here and I still don't know anything.

Matt slowly NODS. Head to knees.

NIGHTMARE IMAGES

As BEFORE, suddenly SKEWING into horrific VIEWS of Stef's DEATH-SHOT - the X-ray fiche - Luther getting wasted - RED EYES - GUNFIRE ousting SURGERY as the predominant IMAGERY.

MINISTER (VO)

Weep if you must for Matthew --

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Matt AWAKES, not expecting daytime, STARTLED at hearing his own name. DISTANT OS of a VOICE droning a EULOGY.

MATT'S POV - THE CEMETERY

MOURNERS in black finery CLOT a funeral in progress about 60 yards away. Matt FOCUSES on the Gothic MINISTER droning on:

MINISTER (CON'T)

-- er, for Matthew Trollenberg, but put
an end to your sorrow, for he died not
with promise unfulfilled, but left our
world having tasted of both the bitter
and the sweet ...

(ETC./OS)

Matt's NOTICE transfers (as the FUNERAL continues BG) to a
YOUNG WOMAN slowly NEARING his position: 21, coltish and
street-sassed, a bit hard-edged, perhaps from time on the
road -- RICHELLE, browsing headstones, consulting a scrap of
paper. Keeps GLANCING at Matt until she's too close for
either of them to ignore the other.

RICHELLE

(warily)

Are you ... Stef?

A familiar note. Matt gets full up with hope. INDICATES:

MATT

Adam Pike's grave is right here.

Richelle tries to read some mystery in the stone. Fails.

MATT

Stef is no longer with us, as of about
twelve hours ago. I never caught a
last name.

RICHELLE

How do you know?

MATT

I saw him die.

Richelle is STARING intently at Matt. Uncomfortably.

RICHELLE

Oh my god.

(beat)

He give you a videotape?

MATT

Yeah. How did you know?

RICHELLE

Call me a mindreader.

She acts like she's not kidding. Pulls out a 4x5 X-ray FICHE of her skull and exhibits it.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

I lost my copy last night.

MATT

Let me guess: Big guy, dark hair, eyes like a snake, humungous gun?

RICHELLE

You a mindreader, too?

Matt shows her his X-ray as a reply. At THE SAME TIME, they BOTH SAY:

MATT/RICHELLE

You got a car?

Richelle SMILES despite her hard attitude. Very POINTEDLY, she THRUSTS out her hand.

RICHELLE

I'm Richelle.

Matt CLASPS her hand and HOISTS himself up into a handshake that LINGERS just a BEAT too long.

MATT

No last name?

Richelle seems to be SCRUTINIZING his soul right through his flesh. She RELEASES him and he RUBS his temple a bit.

RICHELLE

Let's not do that yet, Matt.

HOLD on Matt's quizzical expression as she EXITS first.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER - DAY

A HIGH VIEW of Richelle's CAR (a beat-to-shit primer-gray Porsche) traversing the maze of the parking lot.

MATT (VO)

Then, bang-bang-bang, and my best friend is splattered, cops everywhere ...

INT. PORSCHE - DAY - (TRAVELING) - (CONTINUOUS)

Richelle DRIVES. The interior is littered with wrappers and dust, as though Richelle has been on the road a while.

RICHELLE

... and here you are.

They PARK. Matt STARES dully at the disk Luther gave him.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

What. What is it?

TEARS in Matt's eyes. It's as though Luther is that disk.

MATT

This time yesterday, he was alive.
He gave me this. It was a birthday
present. And he ... he's gone, just
like that, and here I am.

Richelle ALMOST touches Matt's shoulder but pulls her hand back. This HESITANT NON-PHYSICALITY will be her trademark.

RICHELLE

People can die. They can be gone,
just like that.

MATT

Yeah. But when they're gone that fast,
you usually know why. I need to find
out why.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - DR. GREGG'S OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE-UP - A newspaper article headlined STUDENT SOUGHT IN DOUBLE HOMICIDE, featuring an excellent photo of Matt.

Dr. Gregg grimly eyeing the paper as Matt and Richelle ENTER.

MATT

I've, uh, come to get my head examined.

Fast: Gregg DRAGS Matt the rest of the way INSIDE and PUSHES the door shut just as Richelle SKINS through. Fierce WHISPER:

DR. GREGG

Matt, what the hell is going on?!

(indicates PAPER)

You're all over the fucking TV news.

Your picture was in the paper this morning. Color. Above the fold.

Who's she?

Richelle BACKS AWAY, offering a small WAVE.

RICHELLE

Hi.

DR. GREGG

They think you murdered two people last night.

Richelle checks the paper out for herself.

MATT

Who's "they?"

DR. GREGG

The not-very-nice people who are gonna lock your ass in a dungeon if they catch you! My ass, too, because as of right now I'm a goddamned accessory!

Matt WINCES. This isn't what he intended.

MATT

Do you mind ... ?

(Meaning: Do you mind being an accessory?) Dr Gregg doesn't laugh. Keeps WATCHING the door until his mad blows over.

RICHELLE

It's a good picture, Matt.

MATT

Oh, imagine my relief!

DR. GREGG

(stern sigh)

Did you do it?

MATT

No!

Gregg spins to Richelle.

DR. GREGG

Did you do it?

RICHELLE

No!

DR. GREGG

What's your name, again?

RICHELLE

Richelle.

MATT

No-last-name.

Gregg is gradually regaining his equilibrium. Deep breaths.

DR. GREGG

Okay. You're innocent; that's a plus ... what, couldn't your parents decide between Michelle and Rochelle?

MATT

Don't get her mad.

DR. GREGG

Okay. Okay. Let me find some Excedrin, then you can tell me what the hell you want.

INT. X-RAY ROOM - DAY

As Matt's and Richelle's X-RAY FICHES are slapped onto a LIGHTBOARD in CLOSE-UP.

MATT (VO)

You didn't send this?

ANGLE - Dr. Gregg, Matt, and Richelle ponder the fiches.

DR. GREGG

My X-rays are sexier. You've never had plain film run on your heads, either one of you?

They shake their heads no.

DR. GREGG (CON'T)

It's not unusual; most people don't know what their heads look like on the inside. But we're going to take some pictures, right now.

RICHELLE

Why?

DR. GREGG

To find out what that is.

Gregg indicates the OPAQUE SPOT on each fiche, the BEAD. He OVERLAPS the fiches and the bead is located in ALMOST PRECISELY the same place in each brain.

DR. GREGG (CON'T)

Who's first? Volunteers?

Matt and Richelle each want the other to go first.

DR. GREGG (CON'T)

Look, this is going to take awhile, and I'll need to stash you two until the film is ready.

MATT

We lucked out. Spring break; everybody's leaving the campus in droves.

RICHELLE

Have you got a videotape deck in your office?

INT. GREGG'S OFFICE - DAY

Matt UNCOVERS a VCR/TV console practically BURIED beneath journals and paperwork. Richelle LOCKS the door.

TIGHT ON TV SCREEN - STEF'S VIDEO DIARY PLAYBACK

Recorded in FRAGMENTS, different PLACES, different TIMES. Stef grows more HAGGARD and HUNTED with each segment.

INTERCUT Matt and Richelle's REACTIONS, as they WATCH.

1: Behind Stef is the anodized exterior of a big-box trailer rig. The aluminum GLARES hot in the video camera.

STEF

Greetings, fellow victims. My name is Stef, but that's not important. Your names aren't your real names either -- shit, wait a sec.

Stef glances UP as the OS ROAR of a landing JET obliterates what he says. We HEAR the plane but only SEE a SHADOW, crossing Stef. Stef MOVES INTO FRAME, to move his camera.

2: Stef in a motel room, bathed and fresh. We can see the VIDEO CAMERA on a tripod, reflected in a mirror, BG.

STEF

Take Two. Long story short: Once upon a time about two decades ago ...

(NIGHTMARE) MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY - NIGHT

Bubbling beakers, Jacob's Ladders, and Tesla jazz. Experimental ANIMALS are hooked up to torturous-looking TEST DEVICES. ELECTRICS BUZZ. This is all a DREAM INTERPRETATION of Stef's narrative (NOT REALITY, nor the tape) containing ELEMENTS from MATT'S NIGHTMARES.

STEF (VO)

... two guys got the brilliant idea to make kids smarter by tinkering with their brains. A designer for the magic, and a microsurgeon for the wet work.

CAMERA CRUISING AROUND THE MAD LAB

Now ZOOMS IN on DESIGNER (a tall, gaunt, undertaker-like MAN) and the MICROSURGEON (a wild-haired, nutty-professor VERSION of the character we shall later meet as DR. HOFMEISTER), in specs and smock, holding TONGS.

PUSH IN ON THE TONGS

A tiny RED DOT, captured there.

DESIGNER

The first intercranial bead.

STEF (VO)

Originally it was a microchip. Today it would be called a nanobot.

MICROSURGEON

Mental capacities and intelligence will
be boosted exponentially, the way you
take a penny and double it every day.

A WILD GRAPHIC of madly accumulating PENNIES.

MICROSURGEON (VO/CON'T)

In less than one month --

The DESIGNER and MICROSURGEON slap a HIGH FIVE.

DESIGNER/MICROSURGEON

You'd be a millionaire!

STEF (VO)

Guess where they stuck the beads.

ZOOM IN ON THE INTERCRANIAL BEAD

Its configurations SIMILAR to the circuitboard patterns we've
already glimpsed in the NIGHTMARE IMAGES. The BEAD SOARS
like a bat and SMACKS itself into a large gray BRAIN.

3: Stef is backstage in the dark at some kind of movie
theatre. We can HEAR distorted playback OS.

STEF

They had to be planted in babies.
Infants. Or they wouldn't interface
properly.

NIGHTMARE MATERNITY WARD - NIGHT & DAY

Same visual SKEW as the Mad Lab, DAY and NIGHT wildly
ALTERNATING past blowing window curtains. A platoon of PVCed
NURSES tends a vast plastic-tented encampment of BABIES.

STEF (VO/CON'T)

It was the Seventies. Every baby
boomer and dumb yuppie in the world
was reproducing. All kinds of
under-the-table deals went down to
get the babies. 19 or 20 in all.

The DESIGNER hands a five-inch stack of CASH to one of the
PVC NURSES, who trades him a BABY in a shopping bag.

STEF

About now you're asking yourself --

RICHELLE

Where'd the babies wind up?

4: Stef is in a forested area, mid-afternoon, dirty clothes.
He EXHIBITS a 4x5 skull X-ray FICHE to CAMERA.

STEF

That's you. That's me. Excellent grades
in school, but just a tad impertinent?

MATT

Not me, brother.

But Richelle's expression, as she WATCHES, says otherwise.

STEF

The ultimate joke is we all have a
spoilage date.

BEAD GRAPHIC

A planet-sized MACRO VIEW of the bead turning RED, seeming to
CALCIFY, then DARKENING, then SCABBING OVER.

STEF (VO)

You turn 21, the bead goes red.

MATT

That's what he meant. He said --

FLASHBACK TO SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Perhaps in grainy B/W, hallucinogenic. Stef wipes blood away
on his sleeve and shows it to Matt, his eyes GLOWING.

STEF

See? I've gone red.

RESUME STEF ON THE TV SCREEN

STEF

If the goddamned thing doesn't kill
you, it drives you nuts. Or both.
There've been suicides. Each one of
us dies a little differently.

MATT

My birthday was yesterday.

Their eyes travel to Gregg's DESK CALENDAR: APRIL 3rd.

RICHELLE

Mine was two weeks ago.

STEF

Ahh, christ, what the hell is wrong
with this piece of --

The picture FIZZES to static and is REPLACED by:

5: Stef is looking worn-down, woozy or wounded. Lunatic
humor. He waves a book of LIT MATCHES.

STEF

"Happy Birth-day to me ..."

The picture WINKS OUT unexpectedly, mid-sentence, and is
replaced by:

6: Stef, CLOSEST to the state in which we first saw him,
holding the video camera at ARM'S LENGTH. No tripod.

STEF

Okay. Naturally I forgot the damned
charger for this thing. Find the guy
who did the original microsurgery. I
did. His name is Dr. Anton Hofmeister.
Let's just say he lives "in and around"
Washington DC.

The picture starts to WAVER, FIZZ, go WONKY.

STEF (CON'T)

Or just sit tight and do nothing for the
last few days of your life. In which
case, I've come out into the open for
nothing.

The final SHOT is CLEARER and TIGHTER on Stef.

STEF (CON'T)

I don't want to die for nothing.

BLIP! That was where Stef's camera ran out of gas. Matt
VISES his head, the very action SCARING Richelle.

RICHELLE

What! What is it?! Does your head hurt?

MATT

No, I'm okay ...

INT. X-RAY ROOM - DAY

PULL BACK from the two lightboarded FICHES as Dr. Gregg EXPLAINS to Matt and Richelle, starting with the opaque smear, the BEAD.

DR. GREGG

Okay. This is not a flaw in the film. It is an object, an anomaly buried in the hippocampus region. Not part of your brain tissue.

Gregg mounts LARGER, CLEARER (new) plates beneath the fiches.

DR. GREGG

Definately your head. Definately her head. Same size and location in both brains.

Richelle rubs her headache spot.

MATT

So what is it?

DR. GREGG

It's not supposed to be there. It has been there for a long time. It is channeling operating power directly from your brains. It is extremely ... subtle. And I have no idea what it is.

(beat)

I'd like to admit you guys.

RICHELLE

No. No way.

DR. GREGG

Matt, can you tell me what's what?

MATT

Last night, there was this lunatic named Chamb --

RICHELLE

(overrides)

No! Don't say anything!

(rational; to Gregg)

We can't. It'll put you at risk and you've helped us. We didn't kill anyone. Can we ... promise ... to explain it to you as soon as we can?

MATT

If we have the time?

DR. GREGG

If you have the time?

MATT

Don't ask. Listen, we need to know one other thing. Have you ever heard of a doctor named Anton Hofmeister?

RICHELLE

A microsurgeon.

Gregg is being honest when he thinks and answers.

DR. GREGG

Nope. Sorry.

Richelle has moved to a WINDOW and is staring outside.

RICHELLE

Matt? How long after you saw Stef did Chambers first show up?

MATT

It was like a heartbeat. But I don't think he was looking for me. I think he was looking for Stef and lucked out.

Suddenly Richelle is REVVED UP, urgent. She GRABS Matt by the sleeve and HAULS him into the corridor. As they EXIT:

DR. GREGG

Uh -- guys? Excuse me?

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Richelle HUSTLES Matt down the hall.

RICHELLE

We've been in one place too long -- that guy, Chambers, he's coming.

MATT

How do you know?

RICHELLE

Law of averages. Intuition. I just know he's coming here next.

MATT

A trap of near-classic proportions.

HOLD on Matt. Richelle doesn't know what he means.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A room with empty beds. Levellor blinds PART for a HIGH VIEW of a PARKING LOT below. We can see Richelle's car.

MATT

(needling her)

"Intuition."

RICHELLE

Shut up.

MATT

Maybe he's not so smart.

RICHELLE

Wrong.

She POINTS. Sure enough, there's CHAMBERS outside, PHOTOGRAPHING her license plate. He returns to his nearby car. Makes a cell-phone call.

MATT

He's calling it in. If he's going to quiz Gregg then he's probably already gotten to Beckah.

OUTSIDE, Chambers heads briskly for the hospital.

RICHELLE

(mocking)

"Beckah?" As in "beck-a da bus?"

(beat)

Sorry. So now what?

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - DAY

Matt and Richelle MOVE like commandos toward Chambers' car.

MATT

"Beck of the bus?" That's the most moronic joke I've heard in my entire life.

RICHELLE

No it isn't.

They CROUCH behind Chambers' car as Matt digs out a SWISS ARMY KNIFE and begins to PUNCTURE the tires - FSSS. Richelle JIGGLES the door handle - locked. BEAT. An idea occurs and she swiftly EXITS toward her Porsche.

Matt PUNCTURES until the car is sitting on four flats. Richelle RETURNS with a flat sliplock.

MATT

It's locked.

Richelle SLIPS the driver's side lock. Smooth.

RICHELLE

It's unlocked.

Matt can't suppress a GRIN.

MATT

You some kind of car thief?

Richelle SHRUGS gamely. Matt grabs Chambers' car phone.

MATT (CON'T)

Keep an eye out for him. Here we go.

Matt punches REDIAL, then SEND. Number TRILLS. Then CLICKS and multi-digit interconnects.

MATT (CON'T)

It's routing. Some kind of secure number ... wait.

Matt CUPS the receiver and POINTS at the phone.

MATT (CON'T)

They're ID-ing the phone.

More coded NOISES, connections, then a RING. The MALE VOICE that answers is electronically SCRAMBLED:

MALE VOICE (VO)

This is Partridge.

MATT

Tell me about the implant in my head, Mr. Partridge.

MALE VOICE (now PARTRIDGE/VO)

(flustered)

This isn't Chambers.

RICHELLE

Cop car.

Matt HUNKERS lower as a POLICE CAR drifts past, BG.

MATT

No. It's one of the people Chambers is trying to kill. Now why is that, exactly?

PARTRIDGE (VO)

This is ... Matthew, isn't it?

RICHELLE

Hurry up.

MATT

No, apparently I'm not really Matt, according to what Stef said, but Stef has the disadvantage of being extremely dead right now --

PARTRIDGE (VO)

Mr Chambers is not supposed to harm you in any way.

MATT

(angry; unbelieving)

I hear violins.

PARTRIDGE (VO)

What is your exact location?

MATT

Now my asshole is puckering up.

MALE VOICE (VO)

(terse)

You want to know how to save yourself?

Matt SCRAWLS a phone number on his hand. DISCONNECT.

RICHELLE

(urgent)

Matt, come on -- same place, too long.

MATT

I've got one more call.

INT. X-RAY ROOM - DAY

Dr. Gregg is suffering Chambers' interrogatives. Chambers
FIDDLES with equipment he shouldn't be touching.

CHAMBERS

Your answers are ... really quite
unresponsive, Dr. Gregg.

Chambers is about to pull a gun when the PHONE RINGS.

DR. GREGG

Excuse me.

(into phone)

Yes? Yes, this is Dr. Gregg. Oh. Oh.
I see. Yes. Yes, it's really quite
funny, when you think about it.

Chambers doesn't think it's so damned funny until:

DR. GREGG (CON'T)

It's for you.

Angrily Chambers SNATCHES the phone.

CHAMBERS

Who is this?

MATT (VO/PHONE)

Y'know, Chambers, as a secret agent,
you suck major bag.

Chambers goes LIVID AND dashes to the WINDOW.

POV FROM WINDOW - MATT IN PARKING LOT

Elaborately POINTING at Chambers' PHONE as he PULLS OUT THE
WIRE and the connection GOES DEAD in Chambers' ear. Matt DIVES
into the Porsche, which PEELS OUT from the parking lot.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - DAY

As Chambers ARRIVES at a dead run to discover the flats and
the fact that his LICENSE PLATES are also gone.

CHAMBERS

Okay. Okay. So this is how we play.

He slumps in the driver's seat. Calms down. Catches a profile of himself in the rearview.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Hiya, handsome.

He checks his watch. Okay, time for Plan B ...

RICHELLE (VO)

Whole world has gone creepy on us.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Porsche is near Cambridge, headed NORTH.

MATT (VO)

We can chill out at my Mom's.

INT. PORSCHE - DAY - (TRAVELING)

Matt and Richelle on the road.

MATT (CON'T)

I'll tell you my number one problem with this whole story: We're supposed to have amplified brainpower. I can't even crawl to the end of a mid-term and keep all my parts.

RICHELLE

Maybe you have other talents.

MATT

I'm very happy I met you.

Right emotion, totally wrong moment. Matt FUMBLES:

MATT (CON'T)

What about you? Do you feel smarter?

RICHELLE

You know what empathy is?

MATT

Meaning what? "Intuition?"

RICHELLE

Call it sensitivity. Hyper-awareness of feelings, emotional states, in other people.

MATT

You can read my mind?

RICHELLE

No, nothing so science fictional. I can feel it get stronger, several times a year. The last time it amped up, it actually hurt. I should have stayed in Chicago.

MATT

Why'd you come here?

RICHELLE

For my Dad's funeral. I grew up here.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

ANGLE from INSIDE a coin locker as Richelle OPENS it. A videotape is there.

RICHELLE (VO)

Stef figured out how to find me, and left a copy of the tape in a drop.

As she reaches INSIDE, REVEAL Chambers BEHIND her.

RICHELLE (VO / CON'T)

Chambers was there. I could feel it then, but I wasn't fast enough.

RESUME RICHELLE AND MATT IN THE PORSCHE

MATT

Did you make a scene?

RICHELLE

Not exactly.

RESUME RICHELLE IN THE AIRPORT

NEW ANGLE (outside the locker) as Chambers GRABS her bicep from behind, at the LOCKERS.

RICHELLE (VO / CON'T)

He had this, you know, stun gun on his holster?

She TWISTS around and PUNCHES at the taller Chambers.

RICHELLE (VO/CON'T)

It went off.

Chambers JITTERBUGS around as he is SHOCKED, finally CRASHING to the floor. Richelle ESCAPES with just her bag.

RESUME MATT AND RICHELLE IN THE PORSCHE

MATT

Just like that?

RICHELLE

When I touched him I suddenly knew where the stun gun was. The second we were in contact, I knew he had killed my Dad -- just to draw me back to Boston.

Matt is about to tell Richelle he's sorry, but --

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Don't say you're sorry. It doesn't help and you had nothing to do with it.

Really uncomfortable MOMENT of utter silence.

MATT

If you're anything like me, then I bet you just got the hell out of there.

Richelle NODS. Almost to tears, but not quite.

RICHELLE

I lost the tape. I lost the note about the cemetery --

MATT

You remembered it.

RICHELLE

I lost my Dad.

Richelle's voice trails off. It's painful. Matt is staring at her in a queer new way. He REALIZES:

MATT

You have to touch somebody to read them. That's why you don't want to be touched; you're always keeping your distance.

Impulsively he GRABS Richelle's free hand.

MATT (CON'T)

Tell me what I'm thinking.

Richelle's ANGER FLARES and she STANDS ON THE BRAKES. The Porsche FISHTAILS to a sloppy STOP on the shoulder.

RICHELLE

Get out. Deal's off.

MATT

What deal?

RICHELLE

You and me, doing this, get OUT! You're enjoying this! This is a goddamned adventure for you! We play fucking spy and blaze off hunting for some mad scientist who probably doesn't exist!

Richelle DOUBLES OVER in pain, vising her HEAD.

MATT

Richelle! Oh, jesus christ -- !

He TILTS her head back. Her nose is bleeding -- like Stef's. He uses part of his shirt to blot, touching her with concern and kindness, CHATTERING to keep her focused.

MATT (CON'T)

No, you're okay, you're okay, you just popped a little pipe, a capillary, your face is loaded with them; if you break 'em they bleed like crazy and it always looks worse than it is ...

Richelle RELAXES; her breathing evens out.

MATT (CON'T)

Listen to me. You got it wrong. I don't need this kind of "adventure" with my fries. I'm scared shitless. You are too. This is probably the most scared I have ever been in my life. But it doesn't mean we stop here, stop now.

RICHELLE

The bead. The thing. In your head. It's real.

Matt almost asks how she knew that. But doesn't.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

And if yours is real, mine is real.

She SNIFFS carefully; dabs at her face.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Nobody ever tore their shirt off for me.

MATT

Can always get another shirt. Let me drive awhile.

RICHELLE

You know, Matt ...

(beat)

There are some states where you could be arrested for what you were thinking about me.

Matt GRINS -- cautiously.

INT. BOSTON INT'L AIRPORT - DAY

Chambers walks with a purpose toward a guarded door marked HOLDING AREA. Flanking him are FOUR identically-suited MEN wearing sunglasses -- his BACKUPS: SONNY, CHURCH, BLACKSTONE, and THORKEL.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

A windowless interrogation cubicle, where waits REBECCA with all of her airport baggage. Chambers and his men ENTER.

CHAMBERS

Good afternoon, Ms Gunderson. Thank you very much for volunteering to help us with our inquiry.

REBECCA

(snippy, tired)

It's evening. And I was pulled off my plane.

Chambers POINTS. Sonny holds the newspaper photo of MATT in front of her. The other Backups SURROUND her and trade cues.

THORKEL

You fucked this guy.

BLACKSTONE

He's wanted for murder.

Blackstone DANGLES a photo of RICHELLE.

CHURCH

Do you know this woman?

THORKEL

Your boyfriend is on the run with
her right now.

SONNY

Bet he didn't bother to tell you.

Chambers INTERCEDES at just the right moment to allay
Rebecca's growing, trapped-animal terror.

CHAMBERS

Enough. I apologize for these men,
Ms Gunderson. I'm sure you can help
us with what we need to know.

Rebecca's anger is now focused on the photo of Richelle.

REBECCA

Maybe.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Porsche OFFRAMPS to a gas station/mini-mart.

RICHELLE (VO)

Why are you stopping here?

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

The Porsche PARKS and Matt and Richelle GET OUT, STRETCH.

MATT

Two reasons. I need a restroom. And
the car needs new plates. It won't
take Chambers long to call these in.

ANGLE - RICHELLE LOOKS OUT TOWARD HIGHWAY

Abstracting UNTIL a HIGHWAY PATROL car passes BG. While she
watches it, MATT comes up on her BLIND SIDE, STARTLING her.

MATT

Whoa. It's okay. It's me.

He slyly EXHIBITS purloined PLATES beneath his damaged SHIRT.

RICHELLE

Don't sneak up on me.

MATT

I surprised you? That's a surprise.

Matt turns his backs on the COPS and leans close.

RICHELLE

I was thinking about Dr. Nirahda.

Matt BRIGHTENS at this reference to his own past.

MATT

I used to get checkups from him --
twice a year. You don't suppose he
was Dr. Hofmeister?

RICHELLE

Call it a wild presumption, but no.
Dr. Nirahda was East Indian. Maybe
he reported to Hofmeister -- you
know, if anything went wrong.

MATT

Or reported to the other mystery man.
Partridge. Or maybe he was Partridge.

RICHELLE

This is all giving me a headache.

Matt SHARES OUT the drinks he has brought.

MATT

Do you have the nightmares? Knives,
surgery, electronics?

RICHELLE

I have a recurring dream where I'm
caught in a big spiderweb. The
strands of the web are like acid.
They tighten on my skin and eat
through.

It dawns on Matt that --

MATT

You're the girl in the web. In my dream. Stef had the dreams, too -- when he mentioned them he touched my head and I saw images from his dream.

RICHELLE

This is nuts.

MATT

No shit. Agreed.

He keeps a wary eye on the HIGHWAY PATROL CAR, BG.

MATT (CON'T)

Come on. Same place, too long.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The Porsche BARRELS beneath a sign reading HARTFORD. From the passenger side the discarded (Chambers') PLATES are FLUNG with a whoop of joy from Richelle.

INT. PORSCHE - DAY - (TRAVELING)

Richelle WATCHES Matt appraisingly and he's having trouble trying to read her ... well, pleasant expression.

MATT (CON'T)

What?

Richelle smiles small, like someone with a good secret.

RICHELLE

Nothing. It's ironic. There's so many weird things in my head that I never dared to talk about with anybody ... and now you come along and I don't have to explain any of it ... because you already know what it's like. Except for the isolation.

MATT

What do you mean? I've been alone.

RICHELLE

Alone but not lonely. What about your buddy Luther? What about "Beckah?"

MATT

Luther's gone. And as for ... Rebecca, she was perfect for go-nowhere, boring, college-kid sort of guy.

RICHELLE

Matt, you are a college kid.

He shakes his head sadly. He grew up in 24 hours.

MATT

Was.

RICHELLE

And Rebecca?

MATT

Was.

RICHELLE

And me? You just met me this morning.

MATT

I'd say you were the sort of woman I would take to meet my Mother.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE - DAY - (DUSK)

As the FRONT DOOR opens to admit Matt and Richelle. FRAN is SURPRISED to see Richelle but not displeased.

FRAN

Well, what have we here? Is this - ?

Before Fran can say the R-word (Rebecca) Matt JUMPS IN:

MATT

She's not a what, Mom, she's a who and her name's Richelle.

Fran wraps Matt up in a big hug that permits Richelle to WAVE gamely and avoid actual physical contact.

RICHELLE

Hi.

FRAN

Welcome.

They MOVE INSIDE toward the living room: Lots of books. Fish in a big tank. Macramé potholders holding up LOTS of plants. The furniture is all flowingly designed wood and leather (not Danish); new-looking. Indonesian carvings on the wall, tupilaks (Eskimo soapstone) on display in a glass case. Not an antique, grandfather clock, or bisque figurine in sight.

MATT

(aside to Richelle)

I'm gonna stash your car in the garage.

Matt EXITS. Richelle takes in the accouterments.

RICHELLE

Very nice.

FRAN

I swore, no New England parvenue stuff. That way lay the death of my soul. When Franklin died I was determined not to become an old widow -- just shallac my life and leave it at that? So I bought all this stuff new, about two years ago.

RICHELLE

I like it. I love the carvings.

FRAN

Those were Franklin's pride. He was a good man with an astonishing ignorance of cholesterol.

RICHELLE

Matt's dad.

FRAN

Adopted dad. I'm sure Matt told you he was adopted. Franklin and I got Matt when we were in our mid-30s. I'm so glad we waited.

RICHELLE

Is that?

Richelle indicates the FRAMED SNAPSHOT of Matt as a CHILD (the one near the phone). There aren't many PICTURES in the house overall. Fran NODS.

FRAN

Ten years old.

MATT RE-ENTERS.

MATT

She giving you chapter and verse?

FRAN

I thought I'd tear up a salad and we could just get a pizza delivered.

RICHELLE

Sounds good.

(aside to Matt)

Sounds normal.

MATT

(sotto)

You asked for normal, right?

INT. MATT'S OLD BEDROOM - NIGHT - (EVENING)

Bed, desk with a 1987 Mac, an easy chair ALL TARPED IN PLASTIC. Dusty KIDS hardcovers on a top shelf. NO PENNANTS! As ORDERED as his dorm room at a 10-year remove. SHELVES house a collection of electronics from a transistor radio he got at age 9 to a NEON SIGN of Wile E. Coyote he got at 19.

As Richelle, eager to see, ENTERS behind Matt.

RICHELLE

Oooh, let's see the room ...

MATT

Please stop.

RICHELLE

It's like a shrine.

MATT

Blame Mom for the plastic covers on everything; this is the only room in the house she didn't do a complete makeover on.

RICHELLE

Did you keep every ... device you ever owned?

When she picks up a CUBE CLOCK, its primitive electro-VOICE ANNOUNCES that it's "12:42 PM." (It's not.)

MATT

Practically. I liked opening them up,
making them work after they wore out.
That still works.

RICHELLE

I'll call you when I want my clock
cleaned.

They're standing REALLY CLOSE, and Matt runs the backs of his
fingers softly over Richelle's cheek. She TIGHTENS up but
does not pull away.

RICHELLE

Don't.

MATT

You're not touching me. I'm touching
you.

She REMOVES his hand, gently, squeezing his fingers briefly,
but backing off all the same. Change of subject:

RICHELLE

Which way to the freshening-up room?

Matt POINTS down the hallway from his room, PINCHING his
nostrils daintily.

MATT

Watch out for the potpourri.

Richelle TURNS BACK at the door to WHISPER conspiratorially:

RICHELLE

Thanks for bringing me here.

INT. MATT'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT - (LATER)

The demolished salad in evidence around Matt, Richelle, and
Fran. No pizza yet. Fran springs her surprise attack --

FRAN

So how long have you known this lady?

-- and Matt GULPS tea too hard. Now he's going to get a
stroke headache. He rubs his temple.

MATT

Seems like a long time.

Matt and Richelle are staring right at each other.

RICHELLE

Thirty, forty years, at least.

FRAN

You two talk alike. I'm sensing a very important connection here. Matt's other girlfriends -- the ones I met, at least --

MATT

(interposing)

~~Mom~~ ...

Heedless, Mom forges onward into deeper water.

FRAN

-- they never seemed to understand what he was talking about; I mean, they were nice and everything --

Richelle takes the plunge.

RICHELLE

What was Beckah like?

Fran SHRUGS; no data. She makes QUOTE MARKS in the air:

FRAN

Oh. Ruh-becca. The only place I saw her was in some "perfect" snapshots. Looked like she had very expensive teeth. Matt, you're blushing.

MATT

I think I'll just go sit in my dark little room while you guys dish on me.

Richelle is really smiling at last, enjoying this.

RICHELLE

Are you sure you're adopted?

UNDER THE TABLE, in fun, Richelle SQUEEZES Matt's KNEE. The DOORBELL RINGS, OS. Fran grins, anticipating:

FRAN

Pepperoni and fresh mushrooms.

MATT

I'll grab it.

WITH MATT as he hurries to the FOYER/FRONT DOOR and OPENS IT.

The first thing to come through the door is a GUN, centered on Matt's FOREHEAD, with Chambers on the end of it. Chambers BACKS Matt in, a PIECE OF PIZZA in his free hand.

CHAMBERS

They put red pepper on it.

Matt ALMOST makes a move.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Don't.

The BACKUPS ENTER the dining room from the hallway and kitchen entrances, GUNS DRAWN. SONNY steps in behind Chambers, and as he does, we GLIMPSE, parked ACROSS THE STREET OUTSIDE, a MUSCLE VAN -- gray-primed, rusty at the seams, FAT rear tires, SWAT-strength ram bumper up front.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

I brought more guys.

In the DINING ROOM, Fran is understandably agitated. Richelle RISES until Thorkel snugs a SILENCER into her ear.

THORKEL

Sit.

FRAN

Matt, who are these people?! What are they doing here?!

MATT

Mom -- it's okay. Just ... don't do anything ...

FRAN

Okay?!

BLACKSTONE WAGS a finger at her.

BLACKSTONE

No talking. It's like a rule.

CHAMBERS

You know how long it's been since my
last lunch break? My hours are murder.

He GRINS like a serpent at Richelle.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Miss me?

Richelle BRISTLES; Matt wildly tries to warn her off.

MATT

Don't take the bait.

It's the only advice Richelle will heed. Chambers plays it
very sleazy/charming for Fran.

CHAMBERS

Sorry, ma'am. We need to remove these
two from the premises. We don't want
to cause any trouble.

The hate in Richelle's GAZE is palpable.

RICHELLE

Is that how you talked to my father
before you killed him?

CHAMBERS

Ow, you told my secret.

Chambers BACKHANDS Richelle savagely and she GOES DOWN. Matt
is DRIVEN BACK. Sonny's GUN in his face means "no."

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

He wasn't really your father, anyway.

Richelle CLAMPING her bleeding mouth. Matt SEETHING.

MATT

You're not supposed to hurt us.

CHAMBERS

Says who? Whom, I mean.

MATT

Your boss. Your superior.

Thorkel GRABS Fran ... but before he can hurt her, EVERYBODY DOUBLES OVER, RETCHING. Fran VOMITS on Thorkel.

Matt, on his knees and HEAVING, manages to SWING OPEN the front door. In a swirl of milky gas --

A PORTLY FIGURE clad in a white plastic JUMPER and wearing a GAS MASK enters and grabs Matt and Richelle by their forearms. The VOICE is muffled by the mask.

GAS MASK

C'mon, hurry up.

EXT. MATT'S HOUSE - NIGHT - (CONTINUOUS)

Gas Mask hustles Matt and Richelle toward the MUSCLE VAN like two logy privates in boot camp.

GAS MASK (CON'T)

The drug is called apomorphine. You'll feel all right once your stomachs are empty but we must hurry!

WITH THEM to the VAN. Gas Mask DUMPS them in through the (open) side panel door, then LEAPS to the driver's seat.

Thorkel is STAGGERING, Chambers CRAWLING out of the house.

The VAN's engine GUNS; the Van PEELS OUT, fishtailing.

INT. VAN - NIGHT - (MOVING)

INTERCUT EXT. VAN DRIVING SHOTS AS NEEDED.

The FIGURE strips away his MASK to reveal ANTON HOFMEISTER, now in his 60s, white-bearded and Attenborough-esque. Matt and Richelle COUGH and SPUTTER.

HOFMEISTER

Sorry, but it was the only thing I could think of on short notice. Are you all right?

MATT

Ohh ... What did I eat that was bright yellow ...?

Richelle is CLUTCHING her head, rubbing the danger spot.

MATT

Richelle!

Richelle CLEARS, SPITS, GASPS for more air.

RICHELLE

Matt ... it hurts ... it hurts more.

HOFMEISTER

We can try to fix the young lady once we get clear. You, too.

MATT

Who are you?

HOFMEISTER

Friend of Stef's. This is his van. He may have mentioned me. Dr. Hofmeister.

He extends his hand back for Matt to SHAKE but suddenly ROARS through a TURN that SPILLS Matt, his stomach still queasy.

HOFMEISTER (CON'T)

Woops. Hang on!

The Van mirrors show CHAMBERS' CAR in a tire-smoking ASS-SPIN behind them, in pursuit. Now we INTERCUT between the INTERIORS of both vehicles and EXT. STREET as needed, because -- yes! -- this is a CHASE SEQUENCE.

MATT

They've probably got a cop engine.

HOFMEISTER

Mine's bigger.

MATT

I bet this can't even do sixty.

HOFMEISTER

This'll do 110 with the air conditioning on full blast. Stef modified it.

THORKEL FIRES a MAC-10 and BULLETS begin HOLING the back panel anyway, SPENT.

HOFMEISTER (CON'T)

He said it was bulletproof, too.

MATT

Faster!

Both vehicles GAIN SPEED and EAT UP CORNERS. They've PUNCHED OUT of the residential streets and are now DODGING amid nighttime traffic DOWNTOWN, leaving fender-benders, broken glass and DIVING pedestrians in their wake. The Van BELLOWS AROUND a large, slower Greyhound-style BUS.

Matt notices Richelle is in DEFINATE DISTRESS.

MATT

Doc -- she's in trouble.

Hofmeister keeps GLANCING BACK.

HOFMEISTER

Mm. Bother.

He STANDS on the brakes, SLEWING the Van 180° to a STOP in the ONCOMING LANE. He hustles from the seat.

HOFMEISTER (CON'T)

You drive. Can you manage a stick?

Matt JUMPS to the pilot seat and FLOORS IT in first -- as Chambers' ONCOMING car looms big in the windshield! BULLET HITS dot the glass and skin off trim.

Chambers SLAPS the MAC-10 from Thorkel's grip.

CHAMBERS

I can't use 'em dead, you idiot!

Thorkel quickly SMACKS Chambers to POINT OUT that their car and the Van are now on a COLLISION COURSE.

CLOSE-UP - MATT'S WAR FACE

As the chicken contest LOCKS IN and he ACCELERATES.

MATT

Is that front bumper for real?!

Hofmeister, OVER Richelle, gives a thumbs-up.

CLOSE-UP - CHAMBERS' WAR FACE

Ditto. Thorkel isn't too thrilled by this.

CHAMBERS

C'mon you little prick! Show me what
you got!

THORKEL

Wait a minute, man -- !!

THE VEHICLES CHARGE HEAD-ON AT EACH OTHER.

Thorkel BAILS OUT and HITS an industrial trash dumpster.

Hofmeister GRABS Richelle; holds her TIGHT as --

Matt and Chambers HOLLER, totally primal, and --

THE VEHICLES COLLIDE HEAD-ON

The ram bumper immediately ACCORDIONS the hood of Chambers' car. The Van PUSHES the car BACKWARDS at about 40 MPH -- TOWARD THE FRONT OF THE ONCOMING BUS.

Total bugfuck PANIC on the BUS DRIVER'S FACE as he SLAMS ON HIS OWN BRAKES just as --

CHAMBERS' CAR ~~VANISHES~~ AS VAN AND BUS CRASH NOSE-TO-NOSE!

The BUS DRIVER LEAPS from his seat as the PASSAGE of Chambers' car BENEATH HIM HUMPS UP the bus deck. The car TRASH-COMPACTS PAST the space between the bus headlights.

The Bus' TWO FRONT TIRES fly FREE. LUGGAGE CARTWHEELS into the air as Chambers' car PLOWS THROUGH the cargo bay.

In the Van, Richelle and Hofmeister are now PILED UP right next to Matt, an upside-down arm-and-leg TANGLE.

HOFMEISTER

Get us out of here.

Matt BACKS OUT. The front of the Van is mashed uniformly FLAT. The BUMPER is mangled from IMPACT. The Van still ROLLS, but like a cripple.

MATT

This thing has had it.

HOFMEISTER

Just get us around the next corner.

ON THE VAN as it MOVES AWAY, BACKWARD (in REVERSE), SMOKING. It slowly ROUNDS a turn and is GONE as FRIGHTENED PASSENGERS spill off the Bus and KICK OUT the emergency windows.

One of the lower CARGO DOORS falls off its mount. INSIDE is Chambers' car door, which ALSO FALLS OFF amid smoking and steaming wreckage. Finally Chambers HIMSELF crawls out, clutching his safety belt in one hand. DISSOLVE SLOWLY TO:

NIGHTMARE IMAGES

More "info superhighway" SHAPES and COLORS. A BEAD IMPLANT goes bloody-RED. GRIDDED BIOMECHANICAL (vaguely humanoid, naked, razored, sexual) SHAPES DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

WEIRD BLURRY POV - MOVING SHAPES

Backgrounded by ROPEY COLORED LINES that RESOLVE into a MAP of the Washington DC MTA. OS ROAD NOISE.

POV is Richelle's, PRONE, looking UPWARD as Matt or Hofmeister LEAN INTO FRAME. We are now:

INT. HOFMEISTER'S EXAM ROOM (TRUCK) - NIGHT - (MOVING)

As Richelle WAKES UP with Matt holding her hand.

MATT

Hey.

RICHELLE

Hey, stranger. Where are we?

MATT

That's difficult to say.

HOFMEISTER

You're in transit.

Hofmeister SHOWS HER a tiny window and we PUSH IN to see the SURROUNDING COUNTRYSIDE racing past at a legal 55 per.

EXT. BIG-BOX TRUCK - NIGHT - (MOVING)

TIGHT on the obverse of the window, Hofmeister and Richelle LOOKING OUT. PULL BACK to reveal a gleaming BIG RIG with a stainless steel BOX punctuated by door- and window-ports.

INT. HOFMEISTER'S EXAM ROOM (TRUCK) - NIGHT - (MOVING)

RESUMING from ABOVE.

RICHELLE

Okay. Save that one for later. Did I get run over? Shot?

HOFMEISTER

Young lady, you have just suffered what I have come to call "bead sputter."

Matt POINTS, catching her up.

MATT

I give you Dr. Anton Hofmeister.

HOFMEISTER

The device implanted in your brain is powered by a neuron tap. No batteries required, ever.

Matt gives Richelle several blue CAPSULES with water.

MATT

These'll help the headache.

HOFMEISTER

They free up your enkephalin -- a brain opiate. Controls pain.

Richelle SITS UP and sees that the ROOM/unit is sterile, ordered, even homey.

MATT

We've been kidnapped.

HOFMEISTER

Just as I had to kidnap Stefan, to try and save him.

RICHELLE

We're going to D.C. The airport.

HOFMEISTER

That's excellent; how did you know?

RICHELLE

Stef's tape. Before he says he's on the lam, he's standing in front of a trailer like this one. In the very first shot.

FLASHBACK - STEF'S TAPE

PER ABOVE, possibly SLOWED or DISTORTED playback.

RICHELLE (VO / CON'T)

A plane passes over his head, and later he says you're in D.C. but he won't say exactly where.

RESUME GROUP INSIDE TRAILER/LAB

RICHELLE (CON'T)

The plane - the jet - is landing, not taking off, and it's not one of the "heavies," so it's not Dulles Airport.

MATT

"Heavies?"

HOFMEISTER

747s. DC-10s.

RICHELLE

That leaves National Airport. At National, you've got a Navy Yard across the river, a power plant right there, gigantic old rail yards on the Virginia side, about a thousand warehouses everywhere, and Crystal City between you and the Pentagon. Underneath that are millions of cubic yards of below-ground businesses and parking structures.

MATT

Half the Pentagon is underground.

RICHELLE

Plus, National is always undergoing some kind of construction, or re-construction. It's an ideal place to hide a truck.

HOFMEISTER

Trucks. I'm impressed. How did you know the plane was not a big-body?

RICHELLE

I saw the shadow as it passed over.

Hofmeister BEAMS. Matt realizes the doctor is PROUD of the deductive capacity Richelle has just demonstrated.

MATT

Wonder how long it'll take Chambers to
dope all that out.

HOFMEISTER

I assume he already has.

RICHELLE

What about you, doctor? How'd you find
us?

HOFMEISTER

Stefan tracked you down. Once Stefan
left me, I had to track him down.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

PULL UP AND AWAY, LONG, until the single TRUCK is a dot.

HOFMEISTER (CON'T/VO)

I've been one baby step behind our friend
Mr. Chambers for several days. Finally,
I gave up -- figuring your obvious choice
would be to return home.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - NIGHT

An AERIAL SHOT of the Pentagon like every STOCK ESTABLISHING
shot we've ever seen. But CAMERA MOVES ACROSS the 14th
Street bridge to the JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY, until we FRAME
Hofmeister's TRUCK moving along.

EXT. POTOMAC YARDS - NIGHT

Train track and WAREHOUSES. Landing PLANES overhead.
Hofmeister's TRUCK chuffs and BACKS UP to DOCK with an
interlocked TANGLE of FOUR OTHER TRUCKS.

REAR OF TRUCK

A HYDRAULIC COLLAR telescopes to SEAL the rear of the trailer
to the DOOR AREA on the SIDE of another trailer. The steel
TAILGATE hisses down to bridge the gap.

HIGH ANGLE - GROUP OF INTERLOCKED TRUCKS

Anonymous, no exterior lights, near the Potomac River.

INT. HOFMEISTER'S EXAM ROOM (TRUCK) - NIGHT

The room SHUDDERS as the dock STABILIZES.

MATT

Who drives all the trucks?

Hofmeister CHECKS the status of the seal on a small panel.

HOFMEISTER

I have a team of pilots and backups
on call. Not here.

RICHELLE

You can relocate at a minute's notice.

HOFMEISTER

Ten minutes. Come on, step through.

Hofmeister CRANKS a latch and LEADS Matt and Richelle INTO:

INT. HOFMEISTER'S LAB - NIGHT

A larger WORK AREA of see-through CLEAN ROOMS subdivided by
plexi walls. POV: the OBERSE of a gridded TRANSPARENCY of a
BRAIN, THROUGH WHICH we see Hofmeister, Matt, Richelle. It
sputters alight.

MATT

And if you need to blow town, the
airport's right next door.

Hofmeister indicates the BRAIN DISPLAY.

HOFMEISTER

Meet your silent partner.

He holds up a GLASS SLIDE, inserts it into a MICROSCOPE, and
BECKONS Richelle to have a look first.

INSERT - MICROSCOPE POV - THE INTERCRANIAL BEAD

A dark teardrop with a curled LEAD like the tail of a sperm.

RICHELLE

It's all dark.

HOFMEISTER

It's burned out.

MATT

You got that from one of the test kids. "19 or 20" kids, is what Stef said. You were the surgeon. Who was the designer?

HOFMEISTER

Grant Williams. You might have heard the name before.

TOTAL DISBELIEF on Matt and Richelle's faces.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

BACKING OUT of a giant DATAMAX logo. Behind a beehive of mikes is GRANT WILLIAMS, tuxedoed, an EveryNerd who hit the jackpot, late 40ish, a mailroom-to-CEO guy now veneered with the gloss of staggering wealth.

About 20 REPORTERS CROWD FRAME. Video cameras and flashing strobes. Posters and placards proclaim DataMax's "CONNECT AMERICA" program for this high-publicity PRESS CONFERENCE.

WILLIAMS

Now, I don't wish to be mistaken for a philanthropist. I don't aspire to sainthood. I'm just a boy in the world.

Polite LAUGHTER and commiseration.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Give a hundred computers each to a thousand schools and you're helping to "connect America." When every student can learn at his or her own rate, in their own home ... well, you won't need armed troops and metal detectors in your schools, now will you?

WILD APPLAUSE. Williams could get elected President if he wanted to take the pay and status cuts.

HOFMEISTER (VO)

You must remember that two decades ago, Williams was just another hacker with a high IQ. Financially he wouldn't be on the map for another couple of years.

INT. HOFMEISTER'S LAB - NIGHT - (RESUMING)

Matt has just had his look into the microscope.

RICHELLE

That guy gives me the creeps. He wants to trap everyone in their homes behind TV screens and tell them they're safer if they never go outside. Turn the whole country into one big Internet shopping mall of cash flow.

MATT

And the whole country'll help him do it ... unless they find out about his little elective science project.

Matt TAPS his temple where the bead is.

RICHELLE

How'd you round up the babies? Were they -- were we orphans?

HOFMEISTER

Contrary to what you might think, that was the easiest part.

MATT

"Here's a pile of money, mind if I make your otherwise-loser kid into a genius?"

HOFMEISTER

"Here's ten thousand dollars, tax free."

MATT

And you put the kids with adopted parents so you could keep an eye on them. And nothing ever went wrong?

HOFMEISTER

We had one casualty. Age eleven.

MATT

Adam James Pike.

Hofmeister is PLEASED, though confused.

MATT (CON'T)

Stef used his grave as a meeting point.

HOFMEISTER

Somerset Memorial Park. We did the actual operations at M.I.T.

RICHELLE

What happened to him?

HOFMEISTER

Bead sputter, like you suffered in the van.

Richelle RUBS her temple; EXAMINES the capsules given her.

HOFMEISTER (CON'T)

The device accelerates the brain as well as the mind. The light in your mind shines brighter, but burns out faster. First comes bead sputter. Then you "go red" -- Ste. invented the term. Then, shutdown. The bead literally turns off the brain.

RICHELLE

Why didn't you shitcan the program then?

HOFMEISTER

I tried.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - LINCOLN MEMORIAL - DAY - (1988)

Hofmeister and Williams, TEN YEARS YOUNGER, meet on the steps of the Memorial. TOURISTS everywhere. A safe, OPEN spot for a rendezvous, since the two now DISAGREE.

HOFMEISTER ('88)

Think of it politically, Grant. We'll be seen as monsters. Butchers, practicing eugenics on children!

Williams shrugs it off. Casual.

WILLIAMS ('88)

We? I didn't cut anyone open.

The implication SHOCKS Hofmeisters into open-mouthed silence.

WILLIAMS ('88) (CON'T)

Look at the upside. I'll be able to tell every parent in the country that I know how to make their child smarter. Smarter kids assume dominant roles in society. Before long the implant will be seen as corrective surgery. Like glasses for the intellect.

HOFMEISTER ('88)

But even a single failure --

WILLIAMS ('88)

(overrides)

-- is the law of averages. Acceptable losses. I'll win, Anton. I always win.

Williams' point is clear, to himself, at least. HOLD on '88 Hofmeister's face, then, DISSOLVE into:

INT. HOFMEISTER'S LAB - NIGHT - (RESUMING)

Hofmeister's face, now. Remorseful, angry yet penitent.

RICHELLE

You could have just walked away.

HOFMEISTER

No. I wanted to beat him, not win a "push." I wanted to find a way to deactivate the bead without killing the subjects. At that, I failed.

MATT

What about the boss?

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT - (LATER)

Williams delivers his ROUSING WRAP-UP:

WILLIAMS

We're going to raise the grade point average of America! Thank you!

Williams starts fielding questions when a CELLULAR PHONE rings. His smile is TIGHT but controlled.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Excuse me.

ANOTHER ANGLE - more private, as Williams ISOLATES himself and the phone, speaking almost SOTTO VOCE:

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Talk to me.

BEAT. Williams' expression SOURS.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Just get back here with --

(he is interrupted)

Okay, as soon as your team is out of the goddamned emergency ward!

(beat; listening)

You did? Good. Then you're not fired.

He CLICKS OFF. For a second we SEE the pissed-off martinet, then the corporate FACE slides smoothly back onto his personality.

MATT (VO)

Mr Shit-Eating Hope of the Future.

INT. HOFMEISTER'S LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Another section of the TRAILER MAZE. Posh: Polished woodwork, deep-cushioned chairs and a daring slanted dynamic to the room's architecture. Hofmeister has poured confessional brandy; Matt and Richelle stick with beer.

HOFMEISTER

A lot of people want to be just like him.

RICHELLE

Yeah. Have people hunted down and killed whenever you want.

HOFMEISTER

I don't think he wants you dead.

MATT

He just wants us. How were you going to keep him off your back?

HOFMEISTER

I ... attempted to grab his files.

MATT

Attempted.

HOFMEISTER

I only got half. Your background. How to find you. Williams still has all the records of the original experiment. Then something new went wrong.

HIDEOUS MONTAGE - KIDS DYING

All the subjects are 21-year-old VICTIMS of bead burnout. As JUMP-CUTTY and JARRING as visual narrative can be.

A MALE vises his head, screaming, bleeding from the nose.

A FEMALE smashes her face into a mirror.

A FEMALE's BLOOD-RED eyes BALLOON until they BURST.

A MALE OPENS HIS FOREARMS (lengthwise) with a straight razor.

HOFMEISTER (VO)

The other kids began dying. The perfectly healthy ones. At age 21 the bead destroyed them.

These images are CROSSCUT INTO THE ESTABLISHED FOOTAGE OF MATT'S NIGHTMARES.

HOFMEISTER (VO / CON'T)

No exceptions.

RESUME LIVING QUARTERS

Richelle STARTLES, as though on a NOD. The floodtide of images ABOVE is from HER MIND. Hofmeister has his HAND on her shoulder. She rubs her temple.

RICHELLE

Oh! Sorry.

MATT

You okay?

She NODS and takes a long swig of beer.

RICHELLE

Just dry. I feel like I should sleep for a month.

HOFMEISTER

You two are the last two. If he gets you, or you die --

MATT

He gets away with it.

RICHELLE

And so do you.

Hofmeister tries for honesty.

HOFMEISTER

Please. I tried to stop it --

MATT

More than once.

HOFMEISTER

-- but I also helped start it. I don't want anyone's forgiveness. I want to discredit him so he can't try it on anyone else. He probably already has.

RICHELLE

What about Stef?

HOFMEISTER

Stefan. I got to him before Williams could. Same as you. He knew his time was up and I suspect he wanted you two to carry on.

MATT

He shot himself in the head.

This is NEWS to Hofmeister, who thinks it over.

HOFMEISTER

He didn't want Williams picking his brain apart postmortem.

Matt looks around as though seeing the room for the first time. It is all a bit absurd.

HOFMEISTER (CON'T)

We'll begin tomorrow. Rest now.

RICHELLE

I may not be living tomorrow, doctor!
I've already had cluster headaches and blackouts and nosebleeds!

HOFMEISTER

I need your help.

RICHELLE

All you want is revenge.

HOFMEISTER

I admit it. What do you want, Richelle?

HOLD meaningfully on Richelle's desperate expression.

INT. TRAILER COMPLEX CORRIDOR - NIGHT - (LATER)

About midnight. Matt pads along barefoot, searching for light beneath doors. Finds one. KNOCKS gently.

RICHELLE (VO)

Whatever you do, don't say "it's me."
I hate that.

INT. RICHELLE'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Like a really nice cabin on a yacht. The TV is on; a lurid horror title SPLASHES across the screen: **TWISTED BRAIN.** Matt POPS one of Richelle's new pain capsules with a soft drink, rubbing the hot spot at his temple.

MATT

You decent?

Matt turns the TV sound down. Richelle SOBS, OS. He NUDGES the bathroom door open three inches.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT - (CONTINUOUS)

MATT

Get any rest?

RICHELLE

What do you think?

Matt ENTERS. Richelle is wrapped in a white towel, seated next to a broiling jacuzzi, red-eyed, weeping and upset. She holds a bloody TISSUE to her nose. Matt immediately sits down and drops his arm around her.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

I don't want to "get some rest." I don't want to go to sleep. I'm afraid of going to sleep.

She LEANS into him. His face is buried in her fragrant wet hair. She DABS compulsively at her nose.

MATT

C'mon. We're both exhausted.

RICHELLE

Easy for you to say. You've got a couple of days to spare.

MATT

We'll be okay.

She SHOVES Matt away. BIG SPLASH as he goes halfway into the jacuzzi tub. A big container of BODY POWDER upends and DUMPS on top of Matt's head in a swirling white CLOUD.

RICHELLE

I told you not to touch me! Nobody touches me!

She stands there like a wet cat, heaving SOBS ... until she notices Matt in whiteface. Then she just STARES.

Matt FLAILS out of the tub and EXITS the bathroom, leaving a vapor trail of POWDER.

MATT

Fine. I'm sorry. Fine. I'm gone.

INT. RICHELLE'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT - (CONTINUOUS)

As Matt STORMS through, catching sight of himself in a dresser mirror. That nearly tips him over.

MATT

Goddammit!

He begins furiously SLAPPING powder off at himself.

RICHELLE

Matt!

Matt STOPS. Sullen. A beat. Warily:

MATT

What.

RICHELLE

Come back in here.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT - (CONTINUOUS)

As Matt hesitantly RE-ENTERS, we are OTS Richelle.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Use mine.

She HURLS her WHITE TOWEL at him. This leaves Richelle utterly NAKED, skin moist, wet hair combed straight back, and the most attractive thing Matt has ever desired. As he WIPES OFF his face he keeps his eyes DEAD LEVEL with hers. She MOVES CLOSER to him.

MATT

Thanks.

RICHELLE

My pleasure.

Matt's HANDS begin to come up to collect her, but she gives this idea a STERN face, like telling a puppy "no."

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Stop. I said no touching.

Instead she LEANS FORWARD and CAMERA FOLLOWS as Matt LEANS to meet her and JUST THEIR LIPS TOUCH. The contact is galvanic. The KISS rapidly becomes as complex as vintage wine. It races toward critical mass, dizzying, deep-dish.

The many steamed-up MIRRORS in the bathroom reflect their bodies colliding with a hungry, overdue URGENCY. They may only have one night in which to accomplish a lifetime of lovemaking.

EXTREME CLOSE-UP - MATT AND RICHELLE

They finally, reluctantly break apart long enough to see affirmation in each other's eyes. Maybe absolution.

RICHELLE

I know what you're thinking.

MATT

I knew you were going to say that.

RICHELLE

Breathe through your nose.

TIGHT ON SURFACE OF JACUZZI

As Matt, now UNCLOTHED, breaks the surface from beneath. Richelle is ON HIM like a tigress. She can't fill herself with him fast enough, and all of a sudden their entanglement is SIMILAR to that of Rebecca and Matt, way back when Rebecca's life-goal was a single efficient orgasm.

MATT

Wait ... no, wait, not so fast --

Richelle STOPS MOVING; SMILES EVILLY at him.

RICHELLE

I know.

Somehow that's excruciatingly, ecstatically WORSE.

INT. RICHELLE'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT - (CONTINUOUS)

We HEAR Matt and Richelle OS, losing balance or tipping over, the ride momentarily OUT OF CONTROL. The door SLAMS like punctuation. TIME CUT TO:

MATT AND RICHELLE IN BED (MOMENTS LATER)

Matt on top of Richelle. They are one fluid work of art. Richelle REACHES DOWN to his groin and Matt emits a GASP.

MATT

Not yet?

RICHELLE

You mean not again.

He is EXHAUSTING himself into her. This sex has the flavor that only DESPARATE sex can possess. Heart hammering, skin flushed, Matt TIPS OVER and COMES his whole existence out.

FLASH CUTS - NIGHTMARE IMAGE

Richelle TRAPPED in the spiderweb, AS BEFORE.

TIGHT ON RICHELLE - AS SHE ORGASMS

Feverishly hot, SPASMS controlling her diaphragm, her breath, her air, as she, too, SEES herself ENMESHED in the web.

THE WEB CRYSTALLIZES AND SHATTERS

Into fine POWDER like sparkling ground glass. FREED,
Richelle SWANS TOWARD CAMERA. MATCH CUT her trajectory with:

MATT IN BED as Richelle LANDS on top of him. They're
GRINNING foolishly and sucking air as fast as they can. She
SMACKS his cheek, lightly, playfully.

RICHELLE

Pervert.

MATT

I didn't think what you thought I was
thinking. Thought I thunk.

RICHELLE

Guess my clock needed cleaning. Funny.

MATT

What?

RICHELLE

I still don't feel like sleeping.

Matt CARESSES her, clearing strands of hair, blowing on her
to cool her off.

MATT

Neither do I.

INT. HOFMEISTER'S LAB - NIGHT

Just Matt and Richelle now, and some terminal MONITORS
swimming with screen-saver PATTERNS.

WIDEN ANGLE to reveal TWO THICK FILES sitting right there on
the desk. Matt and Richelle trade a dumbfounded expression.

Matt is almost AFRAID to touch the file. But he flips it
open. It is stuffed with a lifetime of paper.

MATT

Somehow I get the feeling he expected
us to come in here.

Richelle GRABS a chair. Begins PAGING through her own file.

WHAT THEY SEE: Birth certificates, medical records, physical profiles, metabolic info, school grades, diet notes, lists of childhood activities and friends -- it's overwhelming.

RICHELLE

Listen: Richelle Price, born Loretta
Johansson, placed with adoptives
Joseph and Etta Price ...

Out of Matt's file drops A DISK.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

(incredulous)

"Loretta?" God, say it ain't so.
(to Matt)

What's that?

Matt INSERTS the disk in a terminal and punches some keys.

The screen boots up a list of 20 names, FIRST NAMES plus LAST INITIALS, including ADAM P., MASON M., CASEY M., STEFAN P. The final two names are RICHELLE P. and MATTHEW J.

MATT

Control list.

CLOSE-UP - MONITOR SCREEN

All the FILES show 20K of memory. Matt's EYES follow the list down. His file -- MATTHEW J. -- shows 42K.

RICHELLE

Every grade I ever made in school.
Every address I've ever lived at.
Copies of every ID card I've ever
gotten.

Matt's DATA comes up on the screen.

MATTHEW J. (Partridge)

Birth name: SAME 4/3/76

Placed with Adoptive Parents: Harry and Frances Jakes 7/1/76

MATT

Partridge. It's my birth name. Every
other first name was changed. Except
mine.

They each READ MORE INFO from thier files.

RICHELLE

Oh, now wait just a fucking minute!
When I had my first period? "Random
samples of" my phone conversations?!

MATT

Didn't you tell me it was better to
know ... Loretta?

Her LOOK shoots daggers at him.

RICHELLE

No Loretta. There is no "Loretta."

Matt FREEZES on one entry, his expression going totally
SLACK. Richelle NOTICES.

RICHELLE

What, find out your real name is
"Moonbeam?"

Matt bleaches DEAD WHITE. STUMBLES back from the terminal,
dumping his chair. FLEES from the Lab.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Matt -- ?!

She CHECKS the screen. Slow SHOCK.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Oh my god.

Richelle EXITS quickly, in pursuit of Matt. When she CLEARS
FRAME the CAMERA MOVES to REVEAL THE MONITOR SCREEN:

Diagnosis Matthew J. Partridge

SEVERE MENTAL RETARDATION - (flawed at birth)
specifics follow:

A long SCROLL of data commences beneath this heading.

INT. TRAILER COMPLEX CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Richelle is looking for Matt in the dark.

RICHELLE

Matt. Matt, c'mon. Matt, don't do
this ... (ETC.)

The interconnections of the trailer units are very MAZELIKE and bewildering ... especially to newcomers.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Matt, gimme a break -- I can't even find my way back to my room!

A STAB of PAIN leans her against a wall, RUBBING her temple as BLOOD leaks from one nostril. She PRESSES ONWARD.

MATT (OS)

In here.

INT. STOREROOM - NIGHT

Richelle ENTERS a windowless cubby crowded with disused EQUIPMENT tarped in plastic (LIKE MATT'S BEDROOM OF OBSOLETE GEAR - a graveyard of defunct projects). Vague NIGHTLIGHT GLOW silhouettes everything. Matt is yet unseen.

MATT (OS)

You see what it said?

RICHELLE

Yes.

Matt's INVISIBLE until he MOVES.

MATT

It explains everything. It explains how all the other test kids got their brain-power boosted while I'm flunking my finals left and right.

RICHELLE

Oh, come on. You can't say that --

MATT

Think about it, Richelle -- at least you can. Why am I not outstanding in any way? Why do I have "intelligence deficit disorder?"

Richelle wants to help him but by now fears the truth, too.

MATT (CON'T)

(louder, angrier)

Because when I was born, my brain was one step up from a green bean. The only reason I'm so boring and normal is that I have an amplifier in my head that's gonna kill me! Goddammit!

He KICKS some fragile junk, which CRASHES to the floor. Richelle GRABS him as forcefully as she can. Gets right in his face. She really means it.

RICHELLE

Matt! Matt, look at me. I'm bleeding. I'm going red! The amplifier in my head is about to shut me down! So listen to me!

(beat; grim calm)

What difference does it make?

He tries to LOSE himself in her embrace.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Shh. Zero difference is what it makes.

She HOLDS him really close. Genuinely HOLDS him.

EXT. POTOMAC YARDS - NIGHT

Same HIGH ANGLE of the trailer cluster, AS BEFORE. TWO CARS coast in. SONNY and BLACKSTONE debark. Swift, silent.

ANGLE - FAVOR CHAMBERS AS HE DEBARKS (PASSENGER SIDE)

Banged up, wearing a NECK BRACE, his left arm in a sling (left hand still bandaged). He holds a BOX with a blinking DIRECTIONAL INDICATOR. He SNIFFS the air, happy.

CHAMBERS

Target acquired.

INT. RICHELLE'S GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

As Matt and Richelle ENTER, clinging onto each other.

MATT

God, I could sleep for about a yea --

A foot - CHAMBERS' - SINKS into Richelle's stomach, COLLAPSING her to the floor. Before Matt can REACT, Chambers' GUN is in his face.

CHAMBERS

Don't.

INT. HOFMEISTER'S LAB - NIGHT

Matt and Richelle SEATED, held at GUNPOINT by Sonny while Hofmeister, in PJs and a robe, is HERDED IN by Blackstone. Chambers PRESIDES. Matt and Richelle EXCHANGE a hurried WHISPERED confab. Richelle is cramped over in pain.

MATT

You okay?

RICHELLE

No. Worse now.

NIGHTMARE IMAGE

A GIANT BEAD on the surface of a PLANET-SIZED BRAIN, SPUTTERING and FLICKERING.

RESUME THE LAB as Hofmeister is SHOVED into a chair. Richelle GRUNTS. A drop of blood FALLS from her nose.

CHAMBERS

Does it hurt? Good.

MATT

Leave her alone.

CHAMBERS

And you are the single dumbest fuck it's ever been my burden to chase around.

Chambers HUNKERS before Matt. Same position as when they were back at Matt's house.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

You let me touch you. Don't ever let anybody get close enough to touch you. They might plant a spider on you.

Voila. Chambers WITHDRAWS a tiny pin-like DEVICE from Matt's shirt collar. Matt REALIZES he's been bugged. Hofmeister's eyes are on the device, too. To Hofmeister Matt says:

MATT

I'm sorry.

CHAMBERS

Oh, cold comfort. Moron.

HOFMEISTER

It couldn't be helped, Matthew.

CHAMBERS

Who ordered you to become such a pain in the ass?

MATT

(re: Chambers' sling)

You should wear your seat belt next time.

Chambers BOUNCES his gun muzzle off Matt's skull. HARD.

CHAMBERS

Oops. Not supposed to hit 'em in the head. My mistake.

HOFMEISTER

Please don't hurt them. Surely you know their situation.

Chambers POINTS the gun at Hofmeister.

CHAMBERS

Shut. Up.

Chambers tries to pull out a cellphone but is hampered by his sling. The LAB CLOCK reads 4:00 AM. The Backups COVER the three captives. He punches a one-button number. Speaks:

CHAMBERS (TO PHONE)

Yes. Yes, they are. Yes, I am. Yes, I will. Hold, please.

Chambers GRABS Richelle's hair and TILTS her head. Flickers of CRIMSON LIGHT in her PUPILS.

CHAMBERS (TO PHONE)

She turning right now. Right away.

RICHELLE

Matt ... ? My head ... hurts.

MATT

Don't think about it. Look at me.

She does, and it breaks Matt's heart that she has GONE RED. His OPEN HAND finds HERS. Chambers RINGS OFF and addresses Sonny and Blackstone:

CHAMBERS

Help me secure these two and then process her, right away.

Chambers PULLS Richelle away but she HANGS ONTO Matt.

RICHELLE

No -- just let me stay. I'll stay right here and I won't move ... okay?

CONCERN seems to cross Chambers' expression.

CHAMBERS

That's really touching.

Chambers SLAPS Richelle hard enough to SPIN her around. In an EYEBLINK the Backups' guns are at Matt's head.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Get her out of here.

Richelle THRASHES; she and Matt are RIPPED away from each other; Blackstone tosses a roll of DUCT TAPE to Sonny.

EXT. POTOMAC YARDS - NIGHT

Blackstone and Sonny DRAG Richelle outside, LOAD her into one of the CARS, and DRIVE AWAY.

THIS ANGLE GOES HAND-HELD POV, now MOVES to the remaining car. Opens door. Pops the trunk. The bomb cases are empty. GLOVED HANDS locate Chamber's STUN GUN.

INTERCUT THIS ONGOING ACTION WITH:

INT. HOFMEISTER'S LAB - NIGHT - (RESUMING)

Matt and Hofmeister are MUMMIFIED to their seats in duct tape; totally IMMOBILIZED so Chambers can go solo.

CHAMBERS

Okay. Just so we're all kissing fresh and up-to-date, this is the guy you think is gonna solve all your problems, answer all your questions, am I right, Matthew?

Chambers is indicating Hofmeister. Matt just GLARES.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Right, well, he can't help you.

MATT

Yes he can.

CHAMBERS

N he can't --

Chambers SHOTS Hofmeister FIVE TIMES, IMPELLING his chair BACKWARD. Caps off the forehead, for professionalism's sake.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

-- because he's FUCKIN DEAD!

HOLD on Matt's shocked face. Dead Hofmeister. Screaming lunatic in his face. Gun pointed at him.

OUTSIDE, the POV INTRUDER stabs a BIG SCREWDRIVER into the gas tank of the car. Fuel gushes into a puddle.

Chambers STEPS gingerly around Hofmeister's pulped body.

CHAMBERS

Eeeuuwww, somebody get a mop.

MATT

They're gonna have to invent a new word for how fucked up you are.

CHAMBERS

And they're gonna have to invent a new kind of casualty to describe how fucked up you're about to be.

DESPITE his dressings, Chambers PIVOT KICKS Matt so hard that he and his chair almost somersault, AS --

OUTSIDE, the INTRUDER snaps a rubber band around the stun gun's TRIGGER. It ARCS. He SKIMS it like a shuffleboard disc into the POOL OF GAS beneath Chambers' CAR, AS --

Chambers UPRIGHTS Matt, itching to do more damage, while --

OUTSIDE, Chambers' car EXPLODES, FLIPPING FORWARD, AERIALY, to LAND UPSIDE-DOWN, on TOP of the Lab trailer, where --

INSIDE, the car CRASHES through the ceiling, propelling Matt and Chambers in opposite directions.

BURNING PARTS SCATTER and FLAMES BILLOW UP. Chambers, still a pro, SCANS for Matt, SHIELDING himself from the heat.

MATT is UPENDED in what's left of one of the Clean Rooms. More VOLATILES EXPLODE and fire LICKS UP the plastic walls, which SHRIVEL and WILT grotesquely in the blast heat!

Chambers BACKS OUTSIDE through the MISSING TRAILER WALL. The HEAT is too much. STARES at the spreading fire. No witnesses. Finally, with grim resignation, he TURNS HIS BACK on the conflagration and WALKS AWAY.

A KNIFE slices through Matt's tape as the INTRUDER frees him.

INTRUDER

(muffled)

Come on, come on, we gotta go, this whole place is about to light up.

Matt SEES the Intruder's hand FLIP A BUTTERFLY KNIFE SHUT before he is dragged AWAY down a TRAILER CORRIDOR.

INTERCUT CHAMBERS WALKING

A little further away. He STOPS, looks back. No Matt.

INT. TRAILER CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Full of SMOKE. Matt and the Intruder are RUNNING now.

INTERCUT CHAMBERS WALKING

Still no Matt -- Chambers has failed to deliver.

CHAMBERS

Bad day.

Behind him the FIRST TRAILER BLOWS ALL TO HELL.

The Intruder SLAMS an interlock DOOR on the FIREBALL that is chasing up behind him and Matt.

CHAMBERS, OUTSIDE, keeps watching as the other TRAILERS explode, 1-2-3. HOLD on his face. He seems DISAPPOINTED.

EXT. 14TH STREET BRIDGE - NIGHT

Matt watches the distant FIRE burn. The INTRUDER pulls away a burnoose-sort of HOOD to reveal STEF -- the top of his head, mostly bandages.

STEF

I can't believe you wrecked my van.

Matt's jaw DROPS. Astonishment.

MATT

Stef ... ?!

STEF

Now we have to walk.

MATT

Stef! What're you doing here?! Why are you alive, man, I saw you blow your brains out!

Matt wants to EMBRACE Stef but Stef BACKS HIM OFF.

STEF

Don't hug me. I got stitches.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - NIGHT - (LATER)

ASSORTED ANGLES on iconographic MONUMENTS and FAMOUS SITES as Matt and Stef HOOF IT into the city.

STEF

Know what Doc always said? That he'd get eliminated just out of spite --

MATT

I'm awful sorry about Doc, Stef.

STEF

-- even if he was no threat, they'd kill him anyway. That's Chambers.

Stef is UPSET but isn't about to show it.

STEF (CON'T)

Don't sweat it. Everybody dies.

MATT

Everybody but you. What happened to you? Why are you still using air? You did shoot yourself in the head?

STEF

Absolutely I did. Real gun and everything. I'm thirsty.

TIME CUT: CONTINUE their trek; now they have beverages.

STEF (CON'T)

Doc told you he couldn't beat the implant, right? Well, I beat it.

Matt HITS the line again, still not believing it.

MATT

By shooting yourself in the head!

STEF

God, don't shout - will you relax?
(beat; chuckles)
You're gonna love this.

FLASHBACK: STEF'S "DEMISE"

A SLO-MO REPLAY of the action at Slaughterhouse.

STEF (CON'T/VO)

I put the gun to my head.

It still SCARES Stef to say those words out loud.

STEF (CON'T/VO)

Right here. Right next to the implant.
I pulled the trigger. BANG.

RESUME MATT AND STEF, WALKING

STEF (CON'T)

It was a steel-jacket on the bullet. Instead of making a big hole, it deflected off my skull. "Traversed the orbit of my head," as they say.

Stef DEMONSTRATES, tracing a trajectory with his finger.

STEF (CON'T)

-- under my skin. Zip - it came right out the far side. If I'd backed that gun a quarter-inch off my head, you'd be staring at an empty space right now. It's a one-in-a-million shot. The angle, the slug, the caliber, timing. All critical, so they told me. But here's the best part.

(beat for drama)

The implant. Stopped it fucking cold. No shutdown, no red mode, no headaches. (touches bandages)
Well ... okay, headaches.

MATT

You are the luckiest son of a bitch in the known cosmos.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

An ER TEAM bursts through ward doors, ROLLING blood-drenched Stef on a gurney.

STEF

They thought I was dead, but they called the ambulance anyway -- nobody knows what to do with dead people. The ambulance took me to the Medical Center --

The gurney ZIPS past DR. GREGG, who TURNS as CAMERA ZOOMS IN ON HIM. Beat. He TAKES OFF AFTER THE GURNEY.

STEF (CON'T / VO)

That guy Gregg is a real friend of yours. I mean an actual friend.

RESUME MATT AND STEF, WALKING. It is now DAWN (MORNING). Matt STOPS WALKING at hearing Gregg's name.

MATT

You saw Gregg?

STEF

He kept them from stuffing me in a drawer in the morgue.

(beat)

You still remember Mr Partridge's contact number?

MATT

Yeah. Why?

STEF

Because that is where they took
Richelle.

Stef POINTS across a boulevard. Nestled there like a chromatic tetrahedon among the monolithic gray obelisks of Washington is the too-geometric corporate nerve center of DATAMAX, INC., all mirrored windows and supermodern design. Matt's heart crumbles at the implacability of it all -- he is nothing, dwarfed by this vast conglomerate.

MATT

It's too late.

STEF

She's not dead.

MATT

She went red.

STEF

Not fatally. She's alive.

MATT

Wait, wait, wait! Do you mean
biologically alive, or are you fucking
with me?

STEF

I mean alive. Long story short: When
you go red, it commences an internal
countdown in the bead. It takes you
from unconsciousness to coma to true
death in 24 hours, give or take.

MATT

How can you be sure?

STEF

I'm smart, Matt. And I'm the first one
who's ever made a round trip. I took
notes, okay?

(checks watch)

She's going to be with us for another
... twelve hours.

INT. BUS DEPOT - DAY (MORNING)

As Stef PULLS a rucksack from a coin locker. Matt has COFFEE in styro cups for both of them.

MATT

What's all that?

STEF

My backup. I made copies of Doc's copies. Just in case. I know all your dirty little secrets ...

Stef exhibits a rubber-banded STACK of disks. Matt comprehends perfectly what he means -- and it hurts.

STEF (CON'T)

Hey. It doesn't matter -- especially not now.

From the bag comes a laptop, wires, gear, and an OLD FASHIONED MODEM. Stef's "apology" suffices for Matt.

MATT

If you're right about Richelle ... what do we do now?

STEF

Figure it out, genius. Thanks to Doc, we have all the bad news on Williams and DataMax.

MATT

Think they're up for a trade?

INT. DATAMAX CORRIDOR - (UNDERGROUND)

A long stone tunnel, almost Expressionist, part of the subterranean honeycomb which is Grant Williams real domain: the "UNDERWORLD" -- WHERE THERE IS NO PRACTICAL "DAY" OR "NIGHT." Just now we are BEHIND CHAMBERS as he walks the distance to --

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND)

Chambers' entrance as SEEN through an AMPULE of BLUE FLUID in Williams' hand. His desk is almost entirely GLASS. The office is OPULENT in a way common folk just can't comprehend.

CHAMBERS

Surgical team's got the girl in the
Iso Unit.

WILLIAMS

And?

CHAMBERS

Still comatose. A veggie burger.

Chambers is hanging out by a LARGE, detailed MODEL
REPRODUCTION of the DataMax Building, the centerpiece of
William's office. He OPENS a hinged wall to REVEAL the
ENTIRE INTERIOR reproduced in painstaking detail, like a
CUTAWAY VIEW -- floors, offices, tiny furniture.

WILLIAMS

You look like shit, Chambers.

This hairsplitting is irrelevant; Williams' agenda is bigger.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

I knew he'd beat you.

(pause)

We'll open her head up and do it
the hard way.

STEF (VO)

You think I wanted those humanitarians
cutting up dead-me? No way.

EXT. STREET NEAR DATAMAX - DAY

Stef has his modem attached between a PAYPHONE and his
laptop. Matt understands his point.

MATT

That's why you shot yourself in the
head.

STEF

See, you're not so dumb. At least
with Doc, the choice was always
mine. Go.

Matt LOOKS at his hand where he WROTE "Partridge's" phone
number yesterday. Closes his eyes. REMEMBERS the number and
ENTERS it. Same NOISES and RELAY SOUNDS AS BEFORE.

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND)

At the PHONE TRILL Williams removes the CELLULAR we saw at the Educational Conference from a drawer.

WILLIAMS

This is Partridge. Is this Matthew?

MATT (PHONE VO)

I want Richelle back.

WILLIAMS

Who's Rochelle?

Matt is consciously emulating Stef's tough-guy routine:

MATT (PHONE VO)

Long story short: Give her back and I don't leave the story of your mad scientist past with the nearest anchorman.

WILLIAMS

Matt? I hate to tell you this, but she's dead.

EXT. STREET NEAR DATAMAX - DAY - (RESUMING)

ON MATT as he hears this news from the source. It hits him like a sledgehammer in the chest.

MATT

She's not dead.

WILLIAMS (PHONE VO)

She's dead, Matthew. She died at 7:30 this morning.

Matt's eyes roll horribly toward Stef. Can this be true? Matt DROPS the receiver and Stef WINCES. Stef holds up an index finger, mouths "one more minute," glancing at his laptop SCREEN. Matt reluctantly LIFTS the receiver.

MATT

Tell me what else.

WILLIAMS (PHONE VO)

Why don't you just come on in, Matt? There's not a whole lot left for you to do. Let us help you --

Stef gives the HIGH SIGN and Matt just HANGS UP.

EXT. ANOTHER D.C. STREET - DAY

Perhaps near some MONUMENT. Matt SEATED on steps, Stef madly PACING, both YELLING, attracting undue public NOTICE.

STEF

She's not dead.

MATT

He said she died!

STEF

He doesn't fuckin know! Look at me!

Matt dutifully pays attention, dully.

STEF (CON'T)

You know the nightmares? That's what she's trapped in, and she can't shoot up a flare. The only way she gets out is with our help! I've been.

NIGHTMARE IMAGE

Set against the GIANT BRAIN, the SPUTTERING MEGA-IMPLANT, is Richelle, flayed and naked and SCREAMING, the strands of the acidic SPIDERWEB enmeshing her worse than ever before.

RESUME MATT AND STEF

STEF (CON'T)

Not a nice place to visit.

Matt's breathing hard. But has a mote of hope now.

MATT

How?

STEF

You in the front door. Me in the back.

EXT. DATAMAX BUILDING - DAY

Here come Matt and Stef, two guys versus this fortress. Stef is wearing cheesy ORANGE COVERALLS lugging a coil of cable.

STEF

Don't act nervous.

MATT

Oh. Thanks a load.

INT. DATAMAX BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

At the RECEPTION AREA, Stef and Matt CHECK IN with one of several uniformed security, a guard named COOPERSMITH.

STEF

Thundercloud Electric. I'm supposed to replace some fiber-optics?

COOPERSMITH

You'll have to be escorted. Got a job confirm?

Matt BUTTS IN, two-for-one-ing Coopersmith.

MATT

My name is Matthew and I'm here to see Mr. Partridge.

STEF

Five-zero-double-five-seven.

Some clicking. Checking. Keyboard action.

COOPERSITH

Wait over there.

(to Matt)

That elevator, sir.

Across the lobby an elevator OPENS. BLACKSTONE waits INSIDE. The elevator doors THUNK shut on Matt like a death sentence.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

TENSE. Blackstone thought Matt was history.

MATT

Feels like we're going down, not up.

Blackstone says nothing. Tight, emotionless PRO, is he.

MATT (CON'T)

How's the wife and kids?

More nothing. So deadpan it's almost funny.

INT. DATAMAX LOBBY (OUTSIDE ELEVATOR) - DAY

Stef's ESCORT is a senior GUARD named BRAINARD, who takes him to a keyed service elevator. They PASS a man who, as he TURNS, is REVEALED as CHAMBERS. He saw Stef but Stef didn't see him. He pulls out his CELLPHONE.

INT. DATAMAX JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND)

Crowded with panels of wires, like the guts of the phone company. Brainard deposits Stef, who looks at the neural sub-net of DataMax almost reverently. Brainard EXITS. On the far side of the room, another REPAIR GUY is at work.

He traces the circuit maze until he locates a considerable bank of CIRCUIT BREAKERS behind locked chainlink. Pulls out WIRE CUTTERS and a SOFT DRINK.

INT. ELEVATOR - (UNDERGROUND)

Chambers in transit, talking to Williams on the cellphone.

CHAMBERS

No, he was dead yesterday. Today he's alive and posing as a repair guy, don't ask me how. He's in the Underworld.

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND)

Williams seated at a desk terminal as the screen ROLLS UP the image of Stef at the check-in desk (SURVEILLANCE CAMERA POV).

WILLIAMS

Not bad.

OS KNOCK on Williams outer office door. He LOOKS UP.

INT. DATAMAX JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND)

Stef INSIDE the chainlink now, opening up power panels.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND)

Chambers, Sonny and Church (still with a big HEAD WOUND) INCH toward the Junction Room.

CHAMBERS

Go.

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND)

Matt ENTERS. The big doors CHUNK shut behind him. BEAT of silence. The carpet here could absorb his life.

WILLIAMS (OS)

You know who's going to take over the world?

Williams ENTERS from a private bathroom, towelling his hair.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Fly-over people. Kids who have kids. Illiterate morons who shop in malls and eat fast food and whose idea of achievement is to reproduce so they can make more little consumers. God love 'em. I'm going to sell each one of them a computer they'll only use to collect dust and get e-mail.

MATT

Tell me who Mr. Partridge is.

WILLIAMS

We're over-breeding a society full of people who are either psychotic predators, or mooing victims. Very soon the only other class will be the people who run everything.

MATT

The people with the brains.

Matt, too, is drawn to the BIG DATAMAX MODEL seen earlier.

WILLIAMS

Now you're talking.

MATT

It's funny. I had a friend once that gave me almost the same speech. His name was Luther, and he's dead because of you.

Williams' expression suggests this is so much tosh.

WILLIAMS

How much did Hofmeister tell you?

MATT

You mean before you had him killed?

INT. DATAMAX JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

AS Chambers' MEN MOVE IN. Each takes one of three narrow ROWS of panels. They can SEE each other between panels.

Stef HEARS them being stealthy, over the OS HUM of current. Takes a quick SWIG of his drink. Then empties a packet of IRON FILINGS into it.

Chambers' men can SEE the hole in the chainlink by now. But NO ONE is inside the cage.

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

Matt at the MODEL. At the desk, Williams pushes a button.

WILLIAMS

Watch.

The pedestal BASE of the model WITHDRAWS into the floor to REVEAL the superstructure of the "Underground." It is a fabulist conception of lucite, its LEVELS and AREA tinted different colors and LABELED in a see-through ant farm of minute, obsessive detail.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Nothing is ever what you first think it to be.

Williams panther-circles CLOSER, now lectorial.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Hofmeister was counterproductive. He was a traitor.

(beat)

Look, we're really getting off on the wrong foot, here -- you want to sit down? You want a drink or something? Do you drink?

Williams is forcing "paternal" and it's not working.

MATT

I want to see Richelle.

Williams fixes HIMSELF a drink anyway.

WILLIAMS

She went red; she's history, man.

MATT

I still want to --

WILLIAMS

(overrides)

What you want is not as important as
what you need.

He holds up the ampule of BLUE LIQUID seen earlier. On his desk is a portable PNEUMATIC HYPO.

INT. DATAMAX JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

Sonny EDGES into the CAGE MAC-10-first, tilting back the CUT WIRE. Sudden CLANK. Chambers and Church STIFFEN, alert.

CLOSE-UP - STEF'S SOFT DRINK BOTTLE

Which Sonny has TIPPED OVER ABOVE HIM, now ROLLING along the tops of the breaker unit and SPILLING IRON-FILING-LADEN LIQUID into the system. SPARKS and SMOKE.

SONNY

Fuck!

He RECOILS. BOUNCES off the cage, back into the breakers.

CLOSE-UP - STEF'S THUMB

Clicking a THROW SWITCH that reads 100A.

At the far end of the cage, Stef has reached through a HOLE he cut to fit his arm. CURRENT is restored to the unit and Sonny is TRANSFIXED between the boxes and the chainlink by dancing electricity. Sonny FRIES crisply.

Chambers and Church OPEN FIRE where they perceive Stef to be. INSTANT CHAOS. Slugs SMASH through the panels.

INT. DATAMAX BUILDING LOBBY - DAY

Two of Coopersmith's MONITORS suddenly SNOW OUT. He KNOCKS on the screens. Twists some dials. Nothing.

INT. DATAMAX JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

More SHOOTING. More panels DESTROYED. EMERGENCY LIGHTS glare through thick SMOKE.

CHAMBERS

Stop, stop, stop! Dammit.

Sonny's CHARRED BODY drops from the breakers -- THUD.

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

The ambient lighting DIMS, then RESTORES.

WILLIAMS

Peak power day.

He plugs the BLUE AMPULE into the HYPO.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

I can cure your little problem with this.

MATT

What is it?

WILLIAMS

It's 20 years-worth of better. Not electromechanical, like the implant in your head, but bacteria-based. Organic.

MATT

Doc was right about you. You're still at it. No thanks.

WILLIAMS

Know what it takes? Half a cc. A drop. Same effect as the implant, except you never go red.

MATT

In theory, right?

WILLIAMS

Up till now we haven't had any live test subjects with the old implant.

MATT

Why didn't you test it on Richelle?

WILLIAMS

What's the point? She was in a coma by the time she got here. Besides, you've got no reason to refuse.

MATT

You don't get to decide that.

WILLIAMS

(chuckles)

The hell you say.

INT. DATAMAX JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

Stef PUNCHES a FIRE ALARM. Chambers SEES him and CUTS LOOSE a BURST that BLOWS Stef through several PANELS in a shower of sparks and blood. Stef DROPS his butterfly knife.

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

Matt has the floor. Williams stands, arms folded. The whole conversation has TIPPED OVER into the surreality of the world's most aberrant father-son dynamic.

WILLIAMS

You should thank me. Everything you are, you owe to me.

MATT

Your experiment fucked up my life.

WILLIAMS

No it did not. You must have seen your own file, Matthew.

MATT

You want gratitude from a guinea pig.

WILLIAMS

You were born, what do they call it now? Differently abled.

MATT

I'm just another one of your victims.

WILLIAMS

Your birthright was life as a victim.

(building angry)

You only had a chance in hell of a normal life because I gave you one!

They're faced off now, in intellectual COMBAT.

MATT

I had no choice.

WILLIAMS

Neither did I! You ungrateful little prick!

Williams BACKHANDS Matt; Matt goes DOWN to the floor.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

You're my son! My only son! My only, brain-damaged, retarded son! Don't you get it?!

Matt gets it. There's a weird LIGHT in his eyes, as though he half-expected this revelation.

MATT

That's why I'm the last one.
Sorry I was such an embarrassment
... Mister Partridge.

A phone by Williams' terminal RINGS and Williams snatches it up while Matt nurses a split lip and RISES.

WILLIAMS (PHONE)

What!?

He gets a very odd expression, then hands the phone to Matt.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

It's for you.

Williams RETURNS to his terminal and keys some instructions. Matt TAKES the phone - it might BITE - and LISTENS:

STEF (PHONE)

Hey Matt. They got me. Classic trap.

INT. DATAMAX JUNCTION ROOM - (UNDERGROUND) - (RESUMING)

Stef is riddled with holes and choking on his own blood HAMMERLOCKED by Church, whom Chambers DIRECTS to HOIST Stef up in front of a FlexCam on a desk terminal.

MATT (PHONE / VO)

Stef, tell me where you are!

(INTERCUT INT. OFFICE AND INT. JUNCTION ROOM AS NEEDED.)

Williams' SCREEN comes alive with a distorted CLOSE-UP of Stef. Big anguish from Matt, who SEES the Junction Room action in a "shuffled" digital real-time STEP-STAGGER.

STEF

No thanks, amigo.

CHAMBERS

Hey, Matt.

Desperate, Matt entreats Williams.

MATT

Stop him.

Williams ponders this. Shakes his head NO.

WILLIAMS

No upside.

STEF

Matt --

MATT

I'm here.

WILLIAMS

I need to make a point, Mr Chambers.
Go ahead.

TIGHT ON STEF as the bore of Chambers' GUN presses against his head.

STEF

Get her back, Matt.

MATT

Just slow down; everybody just wait!

STEF

Get her back.

BOOM! - Chambers SHOOTS Stef in the head. The monitor screen RUNS RED with blood and dark chunks of Stef as Matt SHOUTS:

MATT

Wait -- !

PUSH IN on Matt's shock as he loses Stef ... FOR REAL. And the terminal WINKS to DARK. Williams LOOMS, superior.

WILLIAMS

Ah. So you can be reached.

Matt SHOVES the terminal off the desk. It dies.

WILLIAMS (CON'T)

Thanks. I need a bigger monitor.

Matt seems utterly DEFEATED. His voice is LOW, beaten.

MATT

Show me Richelle and I'll do whatever you want.

WILLIAMS

You'll do whatever I want anyway.
(sharklike SMILE)
My house, my rules.

Williams is talking about the pneumatic HYPO on the desk.
Matt CONSIDERS it, warily.

MATT

Half a drop, huh?

WILLIAMS

Then we can work everything out.

Matt is CLOSER to the hypo.

MATT

This'll fix everything ...

Williams NODS, godlike. Matt GRABS the hypo. HOLDS
Williams' hand against the desk. And INJECTS. The AMPULE
EMPTIES into Williams' hand.

MATT (CON'T)

You first.

Williams STAGGERS back, in SHOCK.

WILLIAMS

That's too much!

MATT

(dead earnest)

You can't get too much of anything.

The empty HYPO in one hand like a spent gun after a shootout,
Matt WALKS toward the office doors.

WILLIAMS

You don't turn your back on me!
Nobody turns --

Williams MOVES to press an alarm but SEES his entire HAND is now a DARK, VENOUS BLUE. He rips open a cuff to see the BLUE SPREADING UP HIS ARM. He STAGGERS after Matt.

Matt tries the double doors. LOCKED. As Williams COMES UP BEHIND HIM, he turns.

MATT

What're you gonna do? Kill me?

The BLUE tint CRAWLS across Williams' FACE. His VOICE goes thick, syrupy.

WILLIAMS

I don't kill anybodd --

Blood ERUPTS from his eyes, ears, nose. As if internal PRESSURE in his braincase was causing the Red Death.

Momentum DUMPS him sloppily into Matt's GRASP. They SMASH into the doors, leaving a smear, and Williams SLUMPS away.

Matt looks around. Bad guys coming any second. No exits. Except -- THE MODEL.

He DASHES to it. PEERS through the maze of plastic. LOCATES the "INFIRMARY/ICU." Then SHOVES THE WHOLE MODEL OVER.

CRASH - The machinery BENEATH the pedestal is revealed. Matt KICKS parts aside and slithers down.

INT. AUXILIARY ROOM - (UNDERGROUND)

Matt EMERGES from ABOVE into a low-ceilinged room containing construction leftovers and the hoist works for the pedestal. In this room, the FIRE ALARM can be heard at last.

He holds the HYPO against the light. A drop of blue liquid still left in the ampule. Matt moves for the nearest door.

PAUSES to orient himself, REMEMBERING the model layout.

MATT

Southwest elevators.

INT. DATAMAX CORRIDOR - (UNDERGROUND)

Matt EMERGES into considerable activity and panic, between the screwed-up POWER and the FIRE ALARM.

He sprints along counting doors. FINDS the elevator. Hits the button. Frantic countdown WAIT. As the DOORS OPEN:

CHURCH (OS)

Hey!

Matt turns. SONNY is headed for him. Reaching for his gun.

MATT

Oh, shit. On me.

Matt ENTERS. Church CHARGES as the doors CLOSE.

INT. ELEVATOR - (UNDERGROUND) - (CONTINUOUS)

Church's GUN HAND comes through FIRST and Matt GRABS it as he and Church PINBALL around, grappling as the car DESCENDS.

The GUN GOES OFF right next to Matt's head.

MATT

Goddammit -- !

Matt PULLS the STUN GUN from Church's holster harness and ZAPS Church right on his HEAD BANDAGE, which BURNS and SMOKES as Church collapses, paralyzed. Matt regards the stun gun.

MATT (CON'T)

It works.

Church's GUN has a LASER SIGHT. Matt stuffs the gun into the small of his back. DING. The doors OPEN and he STEPS OUT.

INT. ANOTHER DATAMAX CORRIDOR - (UNDERGROUND)

A higher-security R&D zone waits around a turn as Matt STEPS OUT. Suited SENTRIES. He won't get past. He gives them a lame little WAVE.

MATT

Hi.

He BACKS INTO the elevator. Doors SLIDE SHUT.

INT. ELEVATOR - (UNDERGROUND)

Church is starting to STIR. Matt must RECALL:

MATT

Infirmary ... overhead access ...
suspended ceilings.

He LOOKS UP toward the ceiling of the car and PUNCHES
EMERGENCY STOP between floors. He SHOCKS Church again.

INT. ELEVATOR SHAFT - (UNDERGROUND)

As Matt PUSHES THROUGH the top of the car. Scans around.
Sees the SERVICE CRAWLWAY.

INT. SERVICE CRAWLWAY - (UNDERGROUND)

Matt CRAWLS along on knees and elbows, muttering:

MATT

"What's that stench?" "OH^h - something
must've died in the goddamn airshaft."

INT. DATAMAX INFIRMARY - (UNDERGROUND)

Like a sickbay on a military vessel. More plexi partitions.
TECHS, a NURSE, and one other PATIENT. Richelle is on life
support monitors in the very last cubicle.

PUSH IN on the ceiling until we see one of the PANELS lift.
A CRACK. An EYE PEERS through.

INT. SERVICE CRAWLWAY - (UNDERGROUND) - (CONTINUOUS)

MATCHING as Matt PEERS DOWN at the layout. He LEANS, puts a
HAND OUT toward one panel, and WINCES when it makes a noise.

INT. DATAMAX INFIRMARY - (UNDERGROUND) - (CONTINUOUS)

One of the TECHS looks UP at the ceiling noise JUST AS MATT
COMES CRASHING THROUGH to LAND heavily in a scatter of
acoustic insulation on an empty BED.

Brief comic BEAT as everyone FREEZES. Matt SCRAMBLES to his
feet. Sees he's in the right place.

NURSE

Jesus -- are you okay?

MATT

Yes. Get out. Everybody out.

Nobody moves. Matt yanks out the GUN and waves it around.

MATT (CON'T)

Everybody get out!

The TECHS and NURSE scatter out into the hallway. The PATIENT takes his IV rack with him. A wall clock reads 1547 HRS. (i.e., 3:47 PM).

MOVE WITH MATT past plexi partitions to RICHELLE'S BED. She is totally still. Eerie altar-like SILENCE versus the chaos of alarms and people just outside the Infirmary.

Matt, panting, slowly places the PISTOL on the bed and takes out the PNEUMATIC HYPO.

FLASHBACK - STEF IN SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Matt's EIDETIC RECALL of Stef plugging the muzzle of Chambers' gun against his temple.

EXCU INTERCUTS of the muzzle INDENTING the flesh near the bead implant area; the ANGLE at which Stef HOLDS the gun.

RESUME MATT AT RICHELLE'S BEDSIDE

Duplicating what he can remember of the above. He PUTS THE HYPO TO RICHELLE'S HEAD. He CLOSSES HIS EYES, remembering.

MATT

Come on, Stef, help me out, man.

FLASHBACK - STEF YELLING

In grotesque SLO-MO, saying "Yeah. Watch this." as his finger TIGHTENS on the trigger --

RESUME MATT AT RICHELLE'S BEDSIDE

-- and Matt's trigger finger TIGHTENS likewise on the hypo.

MATT

You're alive. You made me alive.
You gave me the one thing nobody
ever gave me. You made me feel
safe.

FLASHBACK - STEE'S FACE

GRIMACING in the eyeblink before the gunshot --

RESUME MATT AT RICHELLE'S BEDSIDE

-- doing EXACTLY the same. He wipes away TEARS.

MATT

If you can hear me ... I love you.

FLASHBACK - MACRO CLOSE-UP OF STEE'S TRIGGER FINGER

OVERLAYS in HALF-DISSOLVE with Matt's trigger finger as THEY BOTH PULL IN PARALLEL TIME.

SUPR MACRO EXCU of the tiny amount of BLUE FLUID EXITING the ampule with a fssss noise.

EXCU of the tiny RED DOT on Richelle's temple, left by the injection. No movement.

Already Matt feels he's blown it.

MATT

No. That wasn't right. It wasn't exactly right.

Richelle LOLLS in Matt's grasp. Like a corpse.

MATT (CON'T)

Richelle ...

He stares at HER BLOOD on his hand.

CHAMBERS (OS)

You're terminal, you know that?

ON MATT AS HE TURNS TO SEE CHAMBERS

Who has ENTERED the vacated Infirmary, GUN UP.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

You fucking lunatic.

MATT

I surrender.

This STOPS Chambers, ice-cold.

CHAMBERS

What?

MATT

I said I surrender. Take me in.
I've got a couple of days. At best.

As Matt TURNS, we now SEE that his nostril is BLEEDING.

MATT (CON'T)

I don't want any more lies to be told
about the things I did.

Chambers feels he is in charge once again.

CHAMBERS

That's very commendable, Matthew.
Very adult.

Matt RUBS his temple, WIPES BLOOD from his nose. TURNS HIS
BACK on Chambers, at last, as he did with Williams.

CHAMBERS (CON'T)

Only one miniscule flaw I can see in
that plan.

(beat; grins)

The boss is dead and I'd rather kill
your ass. You keep your hands up and
open. And don't you move.

Matt COMPLIES. Chambers STARTS FIRING, DESTROYING the plexi
separating them with loud HITS as Matt FLINCHES and gets
SPRAYED with frags. Chambers GRINS BIG and draws a bead on
Matt's forehead.

Matt's GAZE drops to Chambers' MIDSECTION. A red laser dot
hovers there. Annoyance creases Chambers' expression.

CHAMBERS

What.

Then Chambers SEES THE DOT, TOO, as --

BOOM! A BULLET HOLE erupts in his chest. He SPINS. DROPS
to one knee.

CLOSE-UP - RICHELLE'S HAND ON CHURCH'S GUN

Having fired BETWEEN Matt's hand and waist. Matt SEES her,
half-risen, woozy, eyes HOT.

CHAMBERS

Oh, no fucking fair, you little
shit!

Matt TURNS, CLOSES his own hand AROUND Richelle's and they
FIRE the gun TOGETHER until the action jams back. Empty.

Chambers JIGS and TWITCHES as he stops eleven 9mm BULLETS.
Then he DROPS, deader than cowflop.

RICHELLE smiles WEAKLY but hopefully.

RICHELLE

What did I miss?

Matt STAGGERS back to her, almost FALLING on her, EMBRACING
her as gently as he can, BURYING his face in her hair.

MATT

We didn't miss anything.

(tender)

I thought you were lost.

RICHELLE

I heard you. I tried to answer. I
tried to say you gave me something
that nobody else ever gave me --
kinship. Someone like me.

MATT

You're bleeding ...

RICHELLE

Matt?

Matt PULLS AWAY. His PUPILS HAVE GONE RED.

RICHELLE (CON'T)

Matt -- ?!

Matt FALLS AWAY from her, LANDING on the HYPO, CRUSHING the
empty AMPULE, the FRAME BLACKING OUT until all we can
PERCEIVE are his lidded EYES -- two red glowing DOTS.

MOVING MACRO POV - INSIDE MATT'S BRAIN

CAMERA RUSHES TOWARD THESE RED DOTS AND THEY EXPAND TO FILL
THE FRAME, "BURSTING" THROUGH INTO MATT'S BLOODSTREAM.

POV ROARS UP MATT'S BLOODSTREAM TO THE BRAIN -- A vast,
tundra-sized STYLIZATION of Matt's dormant MIND.

The LIGHTNING of electrical DISCHARGES all around.

Matt STANDS in the midst of all this. He actually SEES the shredded remnants of Richelle's SPIDERWEB.

MOVEMENT, within the dully-red-glowing MEMBRANE of the GIGANTIC BEAD IMPLANT.

Matt MOVES CLOSER to see:

A thick-limbed FOETAL VERSION of himself, the old Matt, the mentally impaired Matt, gropingly trying to SHRED free of the rapidly CALCIFYING membrane -- already more like a SCAB.

MATT

Go away. You're not me.

He PUNCHES HIS FIST through the membrane and HOLDS the monster Foetus' NECK in a VISE GRIP until it DARKENS and STOPS MOVING.

Matt WITHDRAWS, his own blood on his hands.

The RED LIGHT goes completely out and GREEN LIGHTNING LANCES DOWN from the virtual-violet SKY to TRANSFIX and ELECTRIFY him. As the RED BEAD LIGHT dies, a whole NEW CIRCUIT of his brain SPRINGS ALIGHT IN BRIGHT NEON GREEN --

INT. MEDICAL CENTER ICU - DAY - (BOSTON)

-- as Matt OPENS HIS EYES. He's in a hospital BED, clean linens, with Richelle and DR. GREGG looking down at him.

DR. GREGG

Hate to bother you, but would you
mind squeezing her hand to prove
you're not dead?

Richelle, her head BANDAGED (like Stef's), SMILES BIG.

REVERSE ANGLE - AT MATT

TOTALLY IMMOBILIZED in a special rack of straps and stabilizers. A BIZARRE HYPO DEVICE is precisely TARGETED on his temple, in the neighborhood of the implant.

MATT

I was about to tell you what you
missed.

RICHELLE

I already know. I was with you.

MATT

The whole time?

Richelle NODS. REUNION. Cautious, but genuine. Loving.

TIME CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Richelle PUSHES Matt, in a wheelchair. Dr. Gregg explains.

DR. GREGG

Lucky for you that blue stuff got on
your pants when you fell on the hypo.

MATT

You have got to be shitting me.

RICHELLE

All he needed was a few molecules to
break down ...

Her encouragement seems artificially bright.

MATT

What's the bad news ...?

Gregg and Richelle swap a conspiratorial LOOK.

DR. GREGG

The chemical sequence of the injection
I prepared for you was imprecise.

RICHELLE

We were in a hurry.

MATT

We're still going to die?

RICHELLE

Not we, just you. And not for about
a year.

DR. GREGG

During which time I want to try to
nail the exact molecular structure.

This is tough news. Matt tries for bravery.

MATT

You think you can handle it?

DR. GREGG

If you're willing to become my guinea pig.

MATT

Can't we just officially go to DataMax?

RICHELLE

Um ... well, a funny thing happened to DataMax while you were away.

He STOPS and looks right at her.

MATT

Exactly how funny?

DR. GREGG

The story the news got was that a, quote, "disgruntled employee" went berserk down there.

RICHELLE

You're just another victim. I know because I dragged your heavy ass out.

MATT

What about the cops? The murder charge?

Gregg and Richelle trade another rueful expression.

RICHELLE

Yesterday's news. What's hot today is the stuff that Stef mailed to the newspapers, and every computer magazine and techno-journal in existence.

MATT

Disks?

DR. GREGG

Something like that. A lot of poop on DataMax the company couldn't fight because they were totally crashed -- how's that for irony?

(beat)

Take our boy for a turn outside.

Dr. Gregg gives Richelle a little HUG. To Matt:

DR. GREGG (CON'T)
I ain't gonna kiss you; forget it.
Just get ready to get your psyche
squashed on a chessboard.

As Dr. Gregg EXITS --

MATT
Hey!
(sincere)
Thanks.

Gregg WAVES THIS OFF and EXITS. Richelle PUSHES Matt toward
a door leading to an OUTSIDE PATIO.

RICHELLE
Matt -- did you do any kind of weird
sabotage while you were in there?

MATT
No. I didn't even see Stef mail his
disks. Sneaky guy. And all he did
was pull some plugs, set off some alarms.

INT. WILLIAMS' OFFICE - (UNDERGROUND)

Blackstone LOOMS over Williams' computer terminal.

RICHELLE (VO)
That's funny, because the day after all
the craziness, after all the ambulances
cleared out and the reporters had a
field day ...

Blackstone INSERTS LUTHER'S "NO" DISK INTO THE SYSTEM.

The terminal SCREEN FILLS with a RAINFALL of ones and zeros.
Blackstone frantically tries to EJECT the disc, STOP the
virus. Finally he HITS the terminal. RUNS out of the room.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER GROUNDS - NIGHT

Richelle pushes Matt along and they both take in the stars.

MATT
It must have fallen out of my pocket.

RICHELLE

What?

MATT

"Every computer in the building.
Every database. Anything connected
to it by phone." That's what Luther
said.

He TAPS his bandaged head.

MATT (CON'T)

I've still got Luther, up here. Stef,
too. How many times did Stef save my
life, anyway?

RICHELLE

That covers everyone but Matt and
Richelle.

We think they're going to kiss. Wrong moment.

MATT

Matt and Richelle fell in love during
wartime. Now they have to care for it
and see if it "takes." Now they have
to think heart, not head.

RICHELLE

You touch me, you can't have any
secrets from me.

MATT

Deal.

He MOVES to shake her hand, then YANKS his own hand away at
the last moment, smiling like a fox. FREEZE THIS FRAME.

PULL UP AND AWAY FROM THEM UNTIL THE TRAFFIC GRID AROUND THE
MEDICAL CENTER MORPHS INTO THE ELECTRONIC PATTERNS OF A
GIANT, ENERGIZED CIRCUITBOARD, THEN:

FADE OUT.

the end